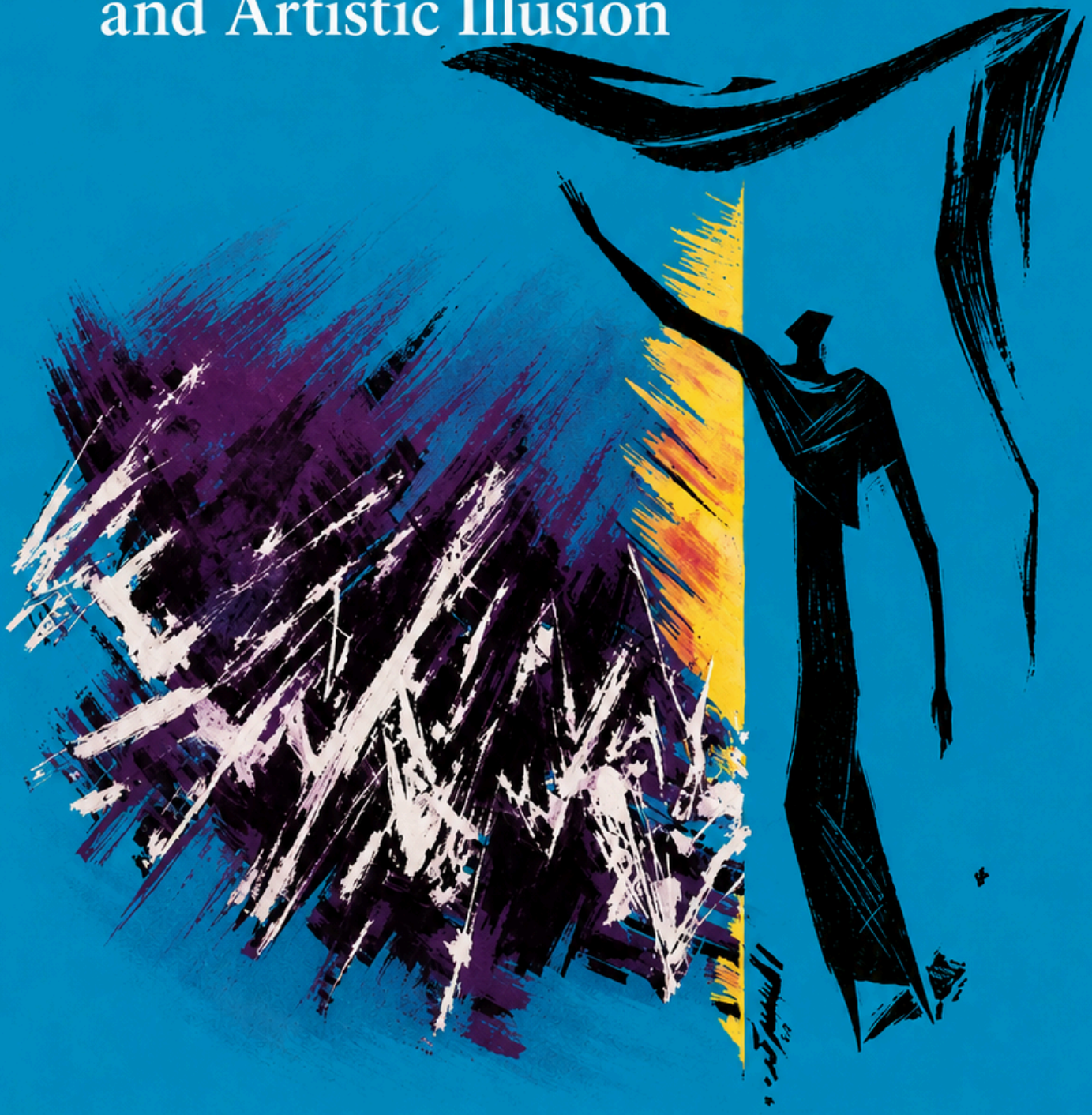
The Arabic Play:

Historical Truth and Artistic Illusion



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The Arabic Play: Historical Truth and Artistic Falseness

Dr. Essam El-Din Abu El-Ela

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Dedication…

To you … the flower of my soul and heart The dearest blessing of God upon me My mother

I dedicate these pages, so that they may intercede for me before your pure hands.

Your son, Essam El-Din

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

﴿ And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you – when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided. ﴾

God Almighty has spoken the truth (Al-Imran, Verse 103)

Introduction:

Our Arab theatre – up until the late 1960s – passed through four fundamental stages, which we summarize as follows:

First Stage: During this phase, the Arab spectator lived in the shadow of his folk theatre, embodied in: Shadow Play – Aragoz – the Rebab Poet – comic skits … etc.

Second Stage: This was the stage of the invasion of the Western theatrical mould into the heart of our Arab culture, during the various Western colonial campaigns. Then, the attempts of Arab playwrights to indigenize this imported theatrical form, by imitating its techniques: through translation, adaptation, and preparation.

Third Stage: This was the stage of pure theatrical creativity, in the Western manner, in terms of writing, directing, and acting. In this stage we came to know Muhammad Taymur, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Nu'man Ashur, and others.

Fourth Stage:

A stage that split into two factions: the first began to call for a return to the sources of our Arab folk arts. Among the earliest pioneering advocates of this trend were: Yousef Idris and Tawfiq al-Hakim. The other faction began trying to incorporate our Arab folk arts into play scripts, and at the forefront of this trend was the late artist Naguib Sorour[^1].

Since the beginning of 1964, and after Yousef Idris finished publishing his three articles entitled "Towards an Egyptian Theatre", the Arab arena began to occupy itself with numerous theoretical studies calling for a pause for objective reflection on the arts we produce in general, and the theatrical art we yield in particular. This is because the proponents of this trend realized that contemporary Arab theatrical art – up to that time – was an art transferred from Western theatrical art. They described it as a remnant of colonial plantations, then called for the necessity of establishing Arab features that distinguish our theatre from other regional theatres. They justified this by arguing that all arts are the legitimate offspring of the land in which they sprout and upon which they live. They, in general, reflect a truthful portrait of the conscience and thought of their creators, and present the causes of their nation. They then described contemporary Arab theatre as a mere transfer of aesthetic forms and imported intellectual concepts from outside the scope of our Arab thought and aesthetic taste. If we search for the first impetus for the emergence of this trend, which concerns itself with aligning theatrical art with its Arab reality, we will find that it arose in the shadow of a major national cause: the cause of Arab nationalist unity. This call to establish a purely Arab theatre with its own national identity emerged to complete the threads of the organized Arab propaganda wave. Therefore, it can be said that a propagandistic character and a nationalist tone clothed that call in a loose political propaganda garb. It was natural for that call to fail, because it was born and raised on a planned nationalist propaganda ground, and thus it died with the death of that scheme.

The artistic call to create a purely Arab theatre is a noble call, because we must have our own art, just as we have our own language, religion, customs, and traditions. If we truly wish to establish it, with a conscious artistic will, we must benefit from two important factors:

The first: that Arab folk theatre which entertained and benefited the Arab citizen for many centuries. We study its features and discern its fundamental characteristics, which reflect our nature as Arabs.

The second: the significant step taken before us by both Yousef Idris – in his theoretical articles entitled "Towards an Egyptian Theatre," and his dramatic application which he called "Al-Farafeer" – and Tawfiq al-Hakim – in his call towards "Our Theatrical Mould," which includes theoretical visions and dramatic application.

Our Arab folk theatre is an indisputable historical truth. We must embody its essential features in our theatrical writings, while ensuring we do not inflict backwardness upon ourselves under the pretext of a false indigenization. Rather, we must select all that distinguishes our truth within it, then establish it in a modern form that suits the requirements of our current lives.

Therefore, we present to Arabic readers today this book, which we have divided into two parts. The first deals with the Arab theatre as a historical truth, presenting an analytical study of the Egyptian Aragoz theatre, documented with live photographs, and appended with a set of folk play scripts that we collected through fieldwork from Aragoz theatre performances spread across the districts of the Egyptian country. In addition, the first part contains a study concerned with the general features of folk theatre.

The second part first examines the theoretical and dramatic experiment of Yousef Idris in "Towards an Egyptian Theatre" and his play "Al-Farafeer," then examines the experiment of Tawfiq al-Hakim in "Our Theatrical Mould."

This book aims to attempt to discover the features of our Arab folk theatre, and to understand the steps taken by predecessors towards creating a purely Arab theatre, in order to benefit from our true theatrical heritage in creating a theatre that expresses the truth of our

concerns with aesthetic techniques emanating from the spirit of our own taste, which distinguishes us from non-Arabs.

And God alone is behind the intention… And He is the granter of success.

Essam El-Din Abu El-Ela Old Cairo / 1993

Part One

Chapter One

A Study of the Aragoz Theatre

Introduction:

Scholars agree that the word “Aragoz,” common in our Egyptian society, is a corruption of the Turkish word “Karagoz,” which consists of two syllables: “Kara” meaning “black” and “Goz” meaning “eye.” Thus the general meaning of the word “Karagoz” becomes “the one with the black eye,” signifying a pessimistic outlook on life[^2].

The Aragoz is one of the forms belonging to what is known as (Puppet Theatre). Specifically, it is a glove puppet. Its head is made of a light, solid material like wood, upon which a face with sharp expressions is painted, and it is topped by a red conical cap (tartour). The Aragoz’s torso and chest consist of a long red gown, and its hands are two pieces of wood. The movement of the Aragoz puppet is controlled by the hand: the player moves the right hand with the middle finger, the left hand with the thumb, and the head with the index finger.

The player’s entire hand disappears inside the red gown of the Aragoz. This is the mechanism for moving the Aragoz puppet. As for the shape of the theatre: from the outside, it is a cart in the shape of a rectangular prism – see Photo 1 – on whose two large surfaces and one of the small faces are drawn and written images of Aragoz and some of the characters who participate in his plays. Some Aragoz masters deliberately attract children through misleading drawings representing characters that the Egyptian child has become accustomed to seeing on the small screen,

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such as the characters (Bogy and Tamtam). The front of the cart contains a door, behind which is a black curtain obscuring what is inside, elevated 60 cm above the ground. Connecting the two levels is a wooden ladder with three steps.

The cart stands on four wheels and is mobile between popular districts according to mulids (saint’s festivals) and holidays. If we look inside the cart, we find it is a theatre meeting all the criteria of theatrical construction in its simplest form. It consists of two main

areas separated by an empty space – see diagram. The first area is the play or acting area, itself divided into two parts separated by a space: the right part is where the assistant and his drum sit, and the second part is for the Aragoz. This is a wooden side facing the spectator at a height of about one meter; the other side is open, facing the assistant, and the spectator cannot see what is inside it. The other two sides are: the left side of the cart and the back of the cart. This is about the play area. The second area (the spectator area) consists of rows of benches with a small space between them that accommodates the foot of a child or lad. There is a separating distance between the two areas that helps the children see the Aragoz.

Aragoz scripts between textuality and improvisation:

There is a collection of dramatic texts specific to the Aragoz theatre, residing in the memory of the players. They inherit these play scripts generation after generation, player after player. This oral transmission may occur from father to son, or from a "master" to one of the young lads. In the case of the player "Samir Abdel Azim," from whom we collected the Aragoz texts, and who is still twenty-five years old, he states that he learned this art from his father "Abdel Azim Mahgoub," and also learned from other Aragoz players who used to work for his father.

Diagram of the Egyptian Aragoz Theatre

Spectator Seats	**The Assistant**
	The Aragoz

Cart Door (Entrance and Exit of Spectators)

Plan of the Egyptian Aragoz Theatre Cart

Image of the Aragoz Theatre Cart

The Aragoz Theatre Cart from Outside

He memorized these oral texts from: Mahmoud Zabeih, Hassan Sultan, and Saber Sheiko. As for the performance technique, he took it – as he says – from (Master) Rabie El-Fayoumi. He learned this art from childhood: Samir learned it when he was only eight years old, and he began practicing this art from the age of eleven until this very day.

This indicates that a player might memorize these oral play scripts from his teacher, while learning the performance technique from another. It is common among the practitioners of this art that the player presents what he memorized from his master's texts orally, and sometimes he approaches some passages through spontaneous, immediate improvisation. The nature of the subject of this improvisation is determined by two factors: The first: the nature of the play being presented. The second: the circumstances of the reception of the artistic process.

For example, in a performance of the play (Aragoz and the Beggar): the player presents an entirely improvised dramatic passage concerning Friday prayer, and also presents another dramatic passage about football, during the days of the 1990 World Cup broadcasts.

Except for these two passages, we find – as the player himself mentions – a play script of unknown authorship, transmitted orally from one person to another. So there is a set of dramatic passages improvised by the player, and there is an original text of unknown authorship.

The dramatic characteristics of the Aragoz theatre: If we read the texts of (Aragoz and the Beggar) and (Aragoz and the Berberi) and others with a careful analytical reading, we can deduce the dramatic characteristics that distinguish the Aragoz theatre. These dramatic characteristics are defined as:

Entrance of the Egyptian Aragoz Theatre Cart

First: The subject treated: The Aragoz addresses a fundamental dramatic situation in most of his plays. This situation is often simple and is represented by the Aragoz being in a state of happiness and ecstasy, expressed through jokes and singing with his friend – often the assistant. However, this state does not last long, as he collides with a pretentious character, in most cases, who spoils his mood. Through a series of attempts, the Aragoz manages to remove this character who disrupts his peace, using his stick, to return to his ecstasy and happiness through singing once again.

Second: Stereotyping of characters: The character models available in the Aragoz theatre, such as: (the Aragoz – his wife – his son – the beggar – the Berberi – the undertaker – the policeman – the thief) … etc., are, in truth, a set of stereotypes, each distinguished by a set of traits. The Aragoz: a simple person who only wants to live as he pleases, hates arrogance and lying – even if sometimes forced to – sharp-tempered, sarcastic, stubborn, humorous. He is a model of the Egyptian "son of the country" (Ibn al-Balad). His wife always represents: the complainer about her husband, ignorant, cunning, talkative, stubborn; she is a model of the bad woman. In the beggar text, we find the model of the lying, deceitful, demanding beggar. Therefore, we can say that these stereotypes and their interrelationships have compelled the folk creator to compose situations that suit them.

Third: Suggesting time and place: The Aragoz theatre often suggests time and place to us without embodying them in the dialogue passage or the visual image. We find in the play (Aragoz and the Berberi), for example, that the Aragoz repeats the attempt to retrieve the stick in temporally distant intervals, even though the lived moment within the performance does not exceed a minute. The assistant informing the Aragoz that the Berberi asked about him three days ago, despite only moments having passed

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since the Berberi's inquiry about the Aragoz. In all Aragoz theatre performances, there are no sets that define the identity of the place or the type of performance presented. Instead, we find a single backdrop of one color, black, uniting all performances.

Fourth: Language: In the dramas of Aragoz, there is a language composed of the vocabulary of Egyptian colloquial Arabic, which varies from one character to another: the

Berberi speaks the language of the Sudanese people in pronunciation and accent, the Sa'idi (Upper Egyptian) speaks the language of the people of Upper Egypt, while the Aragoz speaks the vocabulary of the language of Cairo's inhabitants.

It is worth noting that the Aragoz's language contains some deeply popular vocabulary such as (shootsh) and (kuskusi) and others, and it contains many swear words prevalent in Egypt's popular districts.

Fifth: The entertaining, sarcastic character: Most Aragoz theatre performances are performances belonging to the entertaining character, for the following reasons:

1. The abundance of jokes and witticisms throughout the performance.
2. The hero (the Aragoz) manages to enjoy his freedom after some individuals – who are the triggers of dramatic conflict in these plays – try to spoil the Aragoz's mood.
3. Most plays end happily due to the hero's removal of the obstacles preventing him from living a free life.
4. Reliance on laughter triggers such as: (a) Wording: such as the Aragoz saying to the beggar: "I will report you to the shootsh," where the word "shootsh" suits dogs and not humans. (b) Movement: This is evident in the Aragoz approaching and retreating from the beggar at the very moment the beggar asks him only to come closer.

© Situation: such as the situation where the Berberi sleeps while guarding the Aragoz's house, and when the latter approaches him and he wakes up, the Aragoz pretends to be a man praying. (d) Character: Represented in the stereotypes of the guest characters: the beggar almost asks for a piece of bread and a drink of water, but quickly exposes his stereotype by requesting specific foods as if he were the master of the house. We also find this in the model of the lazy, stupid (Berberi) who works as a guard yet sleeps during the guard, and does not hesitate to beat his master, the Aragoz. The value of laughter is enhanced by the fast-paced acting performance.

Sixth: Guest characters and the element of conflict: The Aragoz begins in a state of ecstasy, happiness, and a feeling of freedom, but soon his chest is burdened with crises upon

the arrival of the guest or visitor, where the Aragoz does not adapt to this new situation, so he makes every attempt to remove this visitor from his world, and he achieves this at the end of every play.

Style of acting performance: The nature of the acting performance carried out by the player in the Aragoz theatre is an indirect performance in its visual aspect, relying on the puppet, and direct in its auditory aspect – where the player's voice is heard.

Since the roles performed in this theatre are various – as in the play Aragoz and the Beggar, for example, where the player performs the roles of both Aragoz and the beggar entirely alone – performing these multiple roles requires the player to differentiate in his direct acting performance (voice) by controlling the delivery of the distinctive dialects of the characters of his play, and by controlling the tone of voice for each character.

Since some dramatic situations involve singing, the player must have a good voice so that he can attract the attention of his spectators by performing a song in a loud voice that surpasses their voices, then entertain them with the opening song and the rest of his theatrical performance.

The acting performance style in the Aragoz theatre is based on suggestion, not illusion. The suggestive acting style means that what the spectator sees is nothing but a theatrical play, while the illusionistic acting style seeks to convince the spectator that what he sees on the acting area is a real, tangible reality before his eyes. The choice of the suggestive acting style is in harmony with the nature of the dramatic structure of the oral play script that the player presents in the Aragoz theatre. The script presented here addresses the spectator explicitly and directly from the beginning of the performance, and this direct relationship, openly revealing the secrets of the game and its mysteries, continues at the same degree throughout the performance of the play. This is for two important reasons: First, the Aragoz player is experienced in his performance, illiterate, making his craft a profession from which he earns a living. Second, the player relies on the magical tool of imagination possessed by the young spectators; they see a puppet that moves, speaks, and tries to imitate them. Therefore, the aesthetic framework of the acting performance does not exceed more than the player's attempt

to imitate human stereotypes. As the player stimulates the young spectator, the process of engaging the children in the midst of the acting process begins, so that they become inside and outside the game, not merely viewing the theatrical performance from the outside only.

The spectator's school in folk theatre:

The spectator in the Aragoz theatre has a particularity that distinguishes him from our official theatre. This young spectator has the right to participate positively in the acting game, such as clapping to the tones of the Aragoz's voice to create a kind of rhythm, or responding to one of the speaking characters, or repeating songs with

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the Aragoz or the assistant. He also has the right – if he can – to engage in dialogue with one of the characters. All this is permissible under the Egyptian folk theatre which has lived for a long time. Despite the arrival of Western arts into the heart of our culture, Aragoz theatre carts, beloved by the suburbs, still exist so that our children may enjoy them.

Dramatic Texts from the Egyptian Aragoz Theatre

(1) Text (Aragoz and the Beggar):

The Assistant: (beats his drum before the Aragoz appears and sings): Flew upon … flew upon … Flew upon her once. Flew upon … flew upon … flew upon her once. (The Aragoz appears, swaying his head, making his distinctive sound.) The Aragoz: Good morning, boys. Children: Good morning, Aragoz. The Aragoz: Happy feast to you all. Children: And to you[^3]. The Aragoz: And next year, God willing, we'll celebrate with you, God permitting. The Assistant and children: God willing. The Aragoz: (to the assistant) Our day is cream – against the oppressor, master? The Assistant: Against the oppressor. The Aragoz: We put our trust in God? The Assistant: In God altogether. The Aragoz: May God honor us, Lord, and spare us the evil of those outside, let's go. The Assistant: (beats his drum and sings. The Aragoz accompanies him in melody)

Why do you ask about me … and say my eyes miss you. Since when are you my love … who knows what's with me. Oh you who ask about me … you're none of my business. Why ask … why do you ask about me[^4]. The Aragoz: (sings, accompanied by the assistant in melody) Why do you ask about me … you're none of my business … etc. (They sing the whole song in alternation.) Oh night oh my eye oh night … the Aragoz oh peace salam. Oh peace … oh peace – oh peace the Aragoz speaks … learns Oh peace oh peace oh peace … I say oh patience of Job … I'm still going to repent at your hands and if time is a cure – and patience is a guarantee, I intend to repent at your hands. Oh mahalabia oh. Children: (sing) Oh mahalabia oh. The Aragoz: Aragoz of the Arab art oh. Children: Oh mahalabia oh. The Aragoz: Samir Abdel Azim oh[^5]. Children: Oh mahalabia oh. The Aragoz: Oh mahalabia oh. Children: Oh mahalabia oh. (The Aragoz disappears and the sheikh "Balha" appears) Sheikh Balha: Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. The Assistant and children: And upon you be peace and God's mercy. Sheikh Balha: (to the assistant) Take … come here, sir. The Assistant: Yes, our brother. Sheikh Balha: Are you from here? The Assistant: God willing.

Sheikh Balha: So of course you're from here? The Assistant: Of course, pasha? Sheikh Balha: So you're definitely from here? The Assistant: Yes, by God, from here. (This question and its answer are repeated several times) The Assistant: We're done. Sheikh Balha: So I am a man from Alexandria … from where? The Assistant: From Alexandria! Sheikh Balha: I came from Alexandria for someone named Aragoz … I am his uncle, the mayor. The Assistant: Welcome. Sheikh Balha: Tell him the mayor came to you from Alexandria and wants you right now, for the Prophet's sake. The Assistant: Oh peace, just like that! Sheikh Balha: Yes, for the Prophet's sake. The Assistant: Alright, tell me what you want and I'm ready to tell him. Sheikh Balha: No … because these two words are a secret. The Assistant: A secret! Sheikh Balha: Because his father, God rest his soul, told me, Sheikh Balha … The Assistant: He said Sheikh Balha?! Sheikh Balha: What else … he said to me, Sheikh Balha: I entrust you with Aragoz … entrust you with what? The Assistant: Aragoz. Sheikh Balha: Because his father had kicked him out 15 years ago. The Assistant: 15 years! Sheikh Balha: Yes, of course … and

of course we kept circling around looking for him, we didn't find Aragoz, he told you he came down here to Egypt – and became a very big man. The Assistant: A very respectable man.

Sheikh Balha: Aragoz has become something else (he shouts towards the imaginary window) You, boy, you playing with the car's hubcap. The Assistant: (speaks to an imaginary someone) Take care of the car, mister, for the Prophet's sake. Sheikh Balha: Let go, boy, the piece of tire, don't take it off, boy. The Assistant: (looks towards the place where Aragoz disappeared) (Aragoz comes out) Aragoz: Yes? The Assistant: Good morning, Aragoz. Aragoz: Morning of jasmine. The Assistant: How are you, Aragoz? Aragoz: God bless you. The Assistant: By God, I missed you… it's been a very long time. Aragoz: You too, by God. The Assistant: All good? Aragoz: Very good. The Assistant: How are the kids? Aragoz: Thank God. The Assistant: Alright, listen, sir. Aragoz: Speak, man, speak. The Assistant: There's someone who came from Alexandria… his name is Sheikh Balha. (Aragoz interrupts him with successive laughs) Aragoz: Sheikh what? The Assistant: Balha. (Aragoz returns to his laughter) Aragoz: Not intending? The Assistant: No… this Sheikh Balha is very cool, totally, he's got a Mercedes, a five-seater.

Aragoz: What's that got to do with me? The Assistant: Your uncle, sir. Aragoz: The mayor? The Assistant: Yes. Aragoz: Where is he? The Assistant: There he is in front of you, sir. (moves towards Sheikh Balha and bursts out laughing) Aragoz: But I don't have an imam! (I don't know him) The Assistant: He's got a Mercedes. Aragoz: This one? The Assistant: Yes, him. Sheikh Balha: (to Aragoz) Aren't you the…? Aragoz: Yes, I'm the… Sheikh Balha: Sir, the… Aragoz: Yes, I'm the… Sheikh Balha: Oh son of the… Aragoz: Yes, I'm the… (The same questions and same answers are repeated several times) Sheikh Balha: Aren't you… Aragoz: I'm Aragoz. Sheikh Balha: Welcome, my cousin. (Sheikh Balha begins to kiss Aragoz) Aragoz: Careful, sir … careful, man … you, uncle … you, man … you (He hits him with his stick) Careful, you smell of onions. (Aragoz frees himself from Sheikh Balha's kisses.) Sheikh Balha: My son. Aragoz: Yes?

Sheikh Balha: Don’t you know who I am? Aragoz: Who are you? Sheikh Balha: I am your uncle, the mayor. Aragoz: (to the assistant) And this is what a mayor looks like? The Assistant: Yes, brother. Aragoz: So this is what a mayor looks like! The Assistant: Yes, exactly … he’s got a Mercedes. Aragoz: Why does he look like beggars! The Assistant: By God Almighty! Aragoz: And our Lord? The Assistant: Stick with him to the end. Aragoz: Alright. Sheikh Balha: Aren’t you Aragoz? Aragoz: Yes, I’m Aragoz. Sheikh Balha: Alright, come closer a bit. Aragoz: (to the assistant) What’s this now! I come closer to him? The Assistant: Get closer to him. No … don’t be afraid … stick with God. Aragoz: No … I’m really afraid of him. The Assistant: I told you, stick with God. Aragoz: No … he’ll bite me. The Assistant: Go up to him anyway and see what he wants. Aragoz: (to Sheikh Balha) Alright, so what do you want with me? Sheikh Balha: I’ll tell you two secret words. Aragoz: Alright, then say them. Sheikh Balha: I can’t say … (gestures towards the spectator children) because of all these people.

Aragoz: (looks at the children) All these people are my family. Sheikh Balha: Never mind. Your father, God rest his soul, told me: Sheikh Balha… Aragoz: (interrupting) Yes, Sheikh Nuwaya? Sheikh Balha: Son, my name is Sheikh Balha, not Nuwaya. Aragoz: Alright, Sheikh Balha. Sheikh Balha: Your father told me … Aragoz: (interrupting) Told you what, then? Sheikh Balha: He told me: Mr. Sheikh Balha, take care, I entrust you with Aragoz. Aragoz: And then? Sheikh Balha: And keep these two secret words just between you and me. Aragoz: Just between you and him? Sheikh Balha: Yes. Aragoz: Alright. Sheikh Balha: Come closer a bit. Aragoz: (to the assistant) Come closer to him? The Assistant: Yes … see what he wants and finish. Aragoz: (moves towards Sheikh Balha) There. Sheikh Balha: More. Aragoz: (comes closer) There. Sheikh Balha: A bit more. Aragoz: (retreats a little) There. Sheikh Balha: What’s this, son!! Are you coming closer or moving away? Aragoz: No … I’m coming closer. Sheikh Balha: Alright … come closer a bit. Aragoz: (comes closer) There. Sheikh Balha: More.

Aragoz: (comes even closer) There. Sheikh Balha: More. Aragoz: (retreats) There. Sheikh Balha: Son, I’m telling you come closer … and you move away from me. Aragoz: (comes

closer) There. Sheikh Balha: More. Aragoz: (comes even closer) There. Sheikh Balha: Bend down now, so no one can see us. Bend down. (Aragoz hits him with his stick) Aragoz: Go on, you son of a scoundrel … blind your father's eye. (to the assistant) He's telling me bend down, bend down so no one can see us. The Assistant: Aragoz? Aragoz: Yes? The Assistant: He means bend down so no one notices, so he can tell you the two secret words. Aragoz: Ah … you should have said so. Sheikh Balha: Son, come closer. Aragoz: (comes closer to Sheikh Balha) There. Sheikh Balha: More. Aragoz: (comes closer) There. Sheikh Balha: More. Aragoz: (comes even closer) There. Sheikh Balha: Bend down. Aragoz: (bends down as if hearing a secret) But don't eat my ear. Sheikh Balha: Son, did anyone tell you I'm a slaughterer of ears? Aragoz: (jumps up in alarm) Don't eat them. Sheikh Balha: Son, am I a slaughterer of ears? Bend down … bend down.

Aragoz: (bends down) There. Sheikh Balha: (whispers to him) Son, I am a man … Aragoz: (interrupting) By God, I see you're a man. Did you think I see you as a boy? Sheikh Balha: Son, I haven't finished my words yet. Aragoz: (puts his hand over his mouth) There. Sheikh Balha: (whispers to him) I, sir … I am a man at God's door, seeking something from God's things … what do you think? Aragoz: (straightens up and bursts out laughing) The Assistant: What is it, Aragoz? (Aragoz continues laughing) Aragoz: (to Sheikh Balha) God damn you and damn your father's wife … all this "come closer" … and "come here" … and "go away" … and "taxi going" … and "taxi coming" … and in the end you tell me I'm a man at God's door? Go, put your trust in God … (to the assistant, aside) Shall I do it to him? The Assistant: Do it to him. Aragoz: (heads towards Sheikh Balha) You, man. Sheikh Balha: Yes? Aragoz: Come closer. Sheikh Balha: Why should I come closer? Aragoz: Are you waiting for me to come closer? … Come closer. Sheikh Balha: (comes closer to Aragoz) There. Aragoz: More. Sheikh Balha: (comes even closer) There. Aragoz: More. Sheikh Balha: (comes even closer) There. Aragoz: Bend down. Sheikh Balha: (bends down for him) There.

The Arabic Play - 33

Aragoz: You, man. Sheikh Balha: Yes? Aragoz: (as if whispering a secret to him) You, put your trust in God … what do you think? Sheikh Balha: What bad news … me, put my trust in God?! Aragoz: (stands and confronts him) Yes. Sheikh Balha: So I should leave my work … and leave the football match … and you come to tell me put my trust in God! Aragoz: (bursts out laughing). The Assistant: What is it, Aragoz? Aragoz: (to the assistant) A beggar and he plays football! (to Sheikh Balha) And what club do you support, sir? Sheikh Balha: I support Zamalek Club. (Aragoz hits him with his stick) Aragoz: God damn you … and damn your father … put your trust in God. Sheikh Balha: Have mercy on me … I am a man of the disabled. Aragoz: And I, for my part, will report you to the shootsh[^6]. Sheikh Balha: I recite over the houses. Aragoz: And I recite over the graves. Sheikh Balha: But I am crippled. Aragoz: And I am broken. Sheikh Balha: Have mercy on me, I'm barely sensing. Aragoz: And I'm snatching (slaps him). Sheikh Balha: (sings) By the Prophet, on God. Aragoz: (sings) By the Prophet, on God. Sheikh Balha: (sings) Disabled, by the Prophet. Aragoz: (sings) Still on God, on God. Sheikh Balha: (sings) By the Prophet, I'm hungry.

Aragoz: (sings) By the Prophet, we haven't cooked yet. Sheikh Balha: Alright, a little water. Aragoz: The pipe is broken. Sheikh Balha: Then from the pump. Aragoz: The pump is clogged. Sheikh Balha: Then from the tap. Aragoz: The water's cut off. Sheikh Balha: Then drink a little water from the sea. Aragoz: The sea, they filled it in, filled it in, filled it in. Sheikh Balha: Even the sea, they filled it in! Aragoz: By God and by God and by God. They filled it in. Sheikh Balha: What shall I tell you? Aragoz: What? Sheikh Balha: So, you won't bring me food? Aragoz: No. Sheikh Balha: If you won't bring me food, I'll stretch out and die. Aragoz: Alright, then die. Sheikh Balha: Who? Aragoz: You. Sheikh Balha: Me! Aragoz: Yes … come on, man, die. Sheikh Balha: Who? Aragoz: You! Sheikh Balha: Me! Aragoz: Yes … die. Sheikh Balha: Me! Aragoz: Yes … die.

Sheikh Balha: Who? Aragoz: You. Sheikh Balha: Me! Aragoz: Yes. (The question and answer are repeated several times) Damn your mother's husband's house… you've exhausted me. So aren't you going to die? Sheikh Balha: No … I will die. Aragoz: Alright, die. Sheikh Balha: Who? Aragoz: (hits him with his stick) So aren't you going to die!! Die now. Sheikh

Balha: Alright, watch out from the path of death now. Aragoz: (retreats a little) There. Sheikh Balha: More. Aragoz: (moves further away from him) There. Sheikh Balha: Why, shall I die on your arm? Aragoz: (retreats more) There. Sheikh Balha: Die on your hand? Aragoz: (retreats more) There. Sheikh Balha: Die on your stomach? Aragoz: (retreats more) There. Sheikh Balha: Die on your chest? Aragoz: Just die already, God damn your mother's house. Sheikh Balha: More. Aragoz: (retreats further, bumping into the wall) There… more than this you won't find. (Sheikh Balha gasps twice and falls)

Aragoz: There you go, you're dead … peace be upon you. The Assistant: (to Aragoz) Sir. Aragoz: Yes? The Assistant: Come here. Aragoz: What do you want? The Assistant: Where are you going? Aragoz: Going home. The Assistant: And you're leaving this man like this? Aragoz: This man was eating kuskusi. The Assistant: What, brother!? Aragoz: He was eating kuskusi. The Assistant: No … no … you're a liar. Aragoz: By God … by God … by God … he was eating kuskusi. The Assistant: And you swear a lot? Aragoz: Alright, ask him. The Assistant: Ask him? And if he says no… Aragoz: He kept swallowing … swallowing … swallowing … until a piece this big (gestures exaggeratingly with his hand). The Assistant: (interrupting) So shall I ask him? (to the spectator children) Do you bear witness, boys? Children: We bear witness. The Assistant: Alright, Aragoz? Aragoz: (does not reply) The Assistant: (leans towards Sheikh Balha's head) Hey, uncle, did you eat kuskusi? (Aragoz approaches, trying to eavesdrop on Sheikh Balha's answer; the assistant notices this attempt)

The Assistant: (to Aragoz) Boy … Aragoz: Yes? The Assistant: Step back. Aragoz: (retreats a little) There. The Assistant: (to Aragoz) Face the wall. Aragoz: (turns and gives him his back) There. The Assistant: (to Sheikh Balha) Did you eat kuskusi, uncle? Sheikh Balha: (does not reply) (Aragoz tries to sneak a look at the answer; the assistant sees him) The Assistant: (to Aragoz) Get down under. Aragoz: (disappears) There. The Assistant: (to Sheikh Balha) Uncle … did you eat kuskusi? Sheikh Balha: (does not reply) (Aragoz appears and hits the assistant on the head with the stick without being seen) The Assistant: (looks up) O folks above … stop throwing things down on those below … (to Sheikh Balha) Uncle, did you eat kuskusi? Sheikh Balha: (does not reply) (Aragoz comes out several times and hits the

assistant … where the latter thinks someone is throwing something at him) The Assistant: (to the hidden Aragoz) Do you want this man to get up? Aragoz's voice: Yes (he appears) The Assistant: Tell him … get up … eat … drink. Aragoz: (to Sheikh Balha) Get up, stuff yourself. The Assistant: He won't? Aragoz: Yes.

The Assistant: Alright, say, "Pray upon the Prophet." Aragoz: Peace and blessings be upon him. The Assistant: Tell him, "Get up, and I'll marry you to my sister." Aragoz: (indignant) I marry my sister to a beggar?! (calm tone) Alright, why don't you marry him to your sister? The Assistant: My sister is bald, she wouldn't suit him. Aragoz: Your sister is bald?! The Assistant: Yes. Aragoz: Alright, tell him that. Ask him. The Assistant: Shall I ask him? Aragoz: Yes. The Assistant: (to Sheikh Balha) Will you marry my sister, uncle? Sheikh Balha: (does not reply) The Assistant: He didn't answer me… you tell him then. Aragoz: (to Sheikh Balha) Get up and marry the… (to the assistant) By God… by God… by God… by God… he's embarrassed. The Assistant: Just say it to him. Aragoz: (to Sheikh Balha) Will you get up so I can marry you to the … get up, I'll marry you to my sister. Sheikh Balha: (rises quickly) Will you put on red and white? (makeup) (Aragoz hits him with his stick) Aragoz: Can you even find food to eat! Sheikh Balha: Have mercy on me… I want to eat (cries). Aragoz: There is no power except from God, O Lord. The Assistant: (to Aragoz) Do you feel sorry for the man? Aragoz: I feel sorry for the man, by God. The Assistant: Alright, ask him what he wants to eat… and whoever loves the beauty of the Prophet, pray upon him. Children: Peace and blessings be upon him.

Aragoz: (to Sheikh Balha) Alright … what do you want to eat? Sheikh Balha: I want to eat, my dear … my darling … peppered rice. Aragoz: Peppered rice!! And what else? Sheikh Balha: And rice pudding. Aragoz: With milk! And what else? Sheikh Balha: And eggplant … and with some tomatoes. Aragoz: Is that true, by God? Sheikh Balha: There is no god but God. Aragoz: May your father's provision be a flea … and ask him … go ahead. (He places imaginary plates before him) The Assistant: Shall I eat with you? Sheikh Balha: (pretends to be eating) Just me, son. Aragoz: (sings) What a night, a night … what a night, oh peace. Children: What a night, a night … what a night, oh peace. Aragoz: The moon of nights …

shines in the heights … what a night, a night … what a night, oh peace. Children: What a night, a night … what a night, oh peace. Aragoz: Night, night, night … what a night, oh peace … oh my night … oh my night … oh my night. I say to patience, Job … and I want to repent at your hand. This is how time is … hand me and woe to you … I … I … I am repenting. Oh night oh eye oh night … oh night oh eye oh night. (End)

Scene from the play Aragoz and the Beggar

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2 - Text (Aragoz and the Berberi):

(The assistant starts alone, beating his drum, producing the tones of “Why do you ask about me”)

The Aragoz: (appears, completing the rest of the melody with his distinctive voice, and begins to sing) Why do you ask about me … and say my eyes miss you Since when are you my love … and who knows what’s with me Don’t ask about me … you’re none of my business. Why ask … why ask … about me.

(The Aragoz completes the song to its end, with the assistant’s participation) Oh night oh eye oh night … oh night oh night oh eye … I say oh patience … why did you break the high one, the moon is still in its place up high … and I, the moon, am coming, oh patience … coming to you and on time … oh patience, well, for the sake of the turning pain, I say to patience, well … and for the sake of the turning pain … my beloved, they described him as medicine for me … and patience was bitter … oh night.

(The Aragoz disappears and the Berberi appears) The Berberi: (to the assistant) There is no god but God … our master Muhammad is the Messenger of God. The Assistant: Our

master Muhammad is the Messenger of God. The Berberi: You, sheikha. The Assistant: Yes? The Berberi: Come here to me[^7].

(The assistant rises from his drum and heads towards the Berberi) Get up, jump up … damn this black sitting of yours. The Assistant: (approaches him) Yes … yes? The Berberi: You, sheikha … do you know who I am? The Assistant: (examining him) I don't notice, by the Prophet.

The Berberi: You don't notice who I am? No … no … you know me. The Assistant: (examining him again) Ah … how are you, Uncle Osman? The Berberi: Didn't I tell you … what's your name, you? The Assistant: My name is Ramadan[^8]. The Berberi: How are you, Uncle Sarsar? The Assistant: My name isn't Sarsar. The Berberi: By God! The Assistant: My name is Ratiba. The Berberi: May they hang you in a barrel. The Assistant: You, lad … my name is Mr. Artist. The Berberi: You know me … who am I? The Assistant: Uncle Osman. The Berberi: Yes, my name is Osman Abu Halima al-Dongolawi… I came from Kordofan… homeland of homelands… to the Arab Republic of Egypt… and I intend to work… eat bread. The Assistant: Ah, going to the army? The Berberi: Take this! (the assistant approaches) What army, you! (slaps him) The Assistant: I didn't catch the word … clarify it a bit. The Berberi: I'm telling you … I work and we eat bread. The Assistant: Ah… that's the first time I've known that story. The Berberi: By God! Why? The Assistant: It's the first time I've known… that your mother was taken by the army! The Berberi: (while hitting him) What's this, you new kid? Are you an idiot? Or are you playing dumb! The Assistant: No… it's from the previous, man, just that.

The Berberi: You're an idiot. The Assistant: No, not an idiot, Pasha. The Berberi: Then what? The Assistant: Sorry … I didn't catch it. The Berberi: You, sheikha … I'm telling you, I work. The Assistant: You work? The Berberi: Yes. The Assistant: Work at what, then? The Berberi: Anything. The Assistant: So if I get you something to work at? The Berberi: Yes. The Assistant: Alright, I tell you what, you work as a ironing man (makwagi)? The Berberi: What does this makwagi do? The Assistant: You know, you do like this (imitates the ironing man).

The Berberi: He spits on people? The Assistant: No, brother. The Berberi: Then what? The Assistant: You spray on the clothes … and iron them. The Berberi: I don't know this … no … no … no. The Assistant: Forget this … you take a bag … go to the market with it … get vegetables? The Berberi: No … I won't work this job. The Assistant: Alright, wait. (He looks towards the place where the Aragoz disappeared) Aragoz. The Aragoz: (does not reply) The Assistant: Now I'll call your master for you.

(He looks towards the place where the Aragoz disappeared)

Aragoz.

The Aragoz: (appears) Yes. **The Assistant**: Good morning, Aragoz. **The Aragoz**: Yes, sir … yes, sir … is it you in everything … (imitates him) Aragoz … Aragoz. **The Assistant**: What can I do! **The Aragoz**: Is there nothing but Aragoz? You keep saying Aragoz … sleeping, you say Aragoz … what is it … this Aragoz, is he married to your father? **The Assistant**: I wish … I'm telling you. **The Aragoz**: Say it, man. **The Assistant**: Pray upon the Prophet. **The Aragoz**: Peace and blessings be upon him … and peace be upon you. (disappears) **The Assistant**: Oh Aragoz! **The Aragoz**: (appears) Oh yes-es. **The Assistant**: I'm telling you. **The Aragoz**: What? And then? … Alright … peace be upon you. (disappears) **The Assistant**: Hey, lad. **The Aragoz**: (appears) Yes? **The Assistant**: Take this. **The Aragoz**: Damn you and damn your father … yes? **The Assistant**: Hey, lad, stand still. **The Aragoz**: I'm standing. **The Assistant**: Shall I tell you something? **The Aragoz**: Say it, man. **The Assistant**: I'll tell you.

The Aragoz: (hits him with his stick) Speak up … say it then. **The Assistant**: I'll say … (Aragoz continuing to hit him) … Son, wait for me … I'll tell you. **The Aragoz**: I've waited. **The Assistant**: Pray upon the Prophet. **The Aragoz**: Peace and blessings be upon him … so? **The Assistant**: Hey, lad … won't you go pray Friday prayer? **The Aragoz**: (starts to leave) I'll go, here. **The Assistant**: Alright, come here, take this … I want to tell you a word before you go pray. **The Aragoz**: (returns to him and faces him) Alright, say. **The Assistant**: Pray upon the Prophet. **The Aragoz**: (impatiently) Peace and blessings be upon him. **The**

Assistant: Increase blessings on the Prophet. **The Aragoz**: A thousand blessings upon you, O Prophet. **The Assistant**: I'm telling you. **The Aragoz**: Say. **The Assistant**: Pray upon the Prophet. **The Aragoz**: (extremely impatient) Peace … and blessings … be upon him. **The Assistant**: Aragoz. **The Aragoz**: Yes? **The Assistant**: Increase blessings on the Prophet. **The Aragoz**: (hits him on the head with his stick from behind) Peace and blessings be upon him. **The Assistant**: (looks upwards) Hey, you. **The Aragoz**: Yes? **The Assistant**: I was talking to you … and someone threw a brick at me! **The Aragoz**: I know!

The Assistant: Alright, wait here … while I look for him. **The Aragoz**: Here. **The Assistant**: (turns his back – looks in all directions except the side where Aragoz stands) **The Aragoz**: (hits him) Look well … (hits him) Look again. **The Assistant**: (turns to Aragoz) Looks like he ran. **The Aragoz**: Ramadan … pray upon the Prophet. **The Assistant**: Peace and blessings be upon him. **The Aragoz**: Ramadan … I'm telling you. **The Assistant**: Say. **The Aragoz**: Pray upon the Prophet. **The Assistant**: O God, bless him. **The Aragoz**: Ramadan. **The Assistant**: Yes? **The Aragoz**: Pray upon the Prophet. **The Assistant**: O God, bless him. **The Aragoz**: Ramadan. **The Assistant**: (hits him) What? Enough already. **The Aragoz**: (holding his head) Damn your father's house … I knew you get upset from words too. **The Assistant**: I'm telling you. **The Aragoz**: Say. **The Assistant**: Since about 3 days ago… **The Aragoz**: (interrupting) And 3 days, oh night. **The Assistant**: Listen, lad. **The Aragoz**: (sings) Didn't find the beauty's stature, oh eye. **The Assistant**: Hey, lad.

The Aragoz: (sings) Yes. **The Assistant**: 3 days ago … we told you … that a Berberi man was asking about you … isn't that right? **The Aragoz**: Yes. **The Assistant**: And here's the Berberi, he's come again, there he is. **The Aragoz**: Where is he? **The Assistant**: (points towards the Berberi who has fallen asleep standing up) There he is standing there. **The Aragoz**: (to the Berberi) How are you, Berberi … you, Berberi … (slaps him) You, sheikh. **The Berberi**: (wakes up startled) What's going on? **The Assistant**: (to the Berberi) Your master, here. **The Berberi**: (to Aragoz) Welcome, oh … (Aragoz slaps him and disappears) Damn your father's house onto the last neighbor's house. (to the assistant) Where's my master you told me about? **The Assistant**: He was standing in front of you just now. **The Berberi**:

Call him for me. **The Assistant**: (to the Aragoz) Aragoz. **The Aragoz**: Yes? **The Assistant**: (to the Aragoz, who hasn't appeared) The Berberi's here. (The Berberi disappears and Aragoz appears) **The Aragoz**: Yes? **The Assistant**: The Berberi's here. **The Aragoz**: (hits the assistant with his stick) Where is he, brother? God damn you and damn your father. **The Assistant**: He was standing here, by God.

The Aragoz: Where's the Berberi? **The Assistant**: (to the hidden Berberi) Hey, Berberi. **The Berberi**: (Aragoz disappears and the Berberi appears) Yes. **The Assistant**: (points towards the place where Aragoz was standing without looking) Your master's here. **The Berberi**: Welcome, oh … (notices and doesn't find Aragoz) (to the assistant) Ah, you daughter of a shoe sole … you want to play me, you daughter of a pimp? **The Assistant**: (calls for Aragoz) Aragoz. **The Aragoz**: (the Berberi disappears and Aragoz appears) Yes. **The Assistant**: (points towards the place where the Berberi was standing) There. **The Aragoz**: Where is he? (slaps the assistant) (And the assistant keeps calling both of them alternately until they collide together.) Lord, cover us. **The Berberi**: (to Aragoz) What's this, lad? **The Aragoz**: (aside to assistant) This Berberi's face is very black. **The Assistant**: (aside to Aragoz) Will you employ him or water him down?! **The Aragoz**: (to the Berberi) You, boy, Berberi. **The Berberi**: What? (headbutts Aragoz) **The Aragoz**: Oh black ruin. **The Assistant**: (to Aragoz) What's wrong, lad? **The Aragoz**: (aside to assistant) Is this a Berberi? **The Assistant**: (aside to Aragoz) What else? **The Aragoz**: (aside to assistant) He looks like a buffalo cow. **The Assistant**: (to Aragoz) What buffalo, lad? **The Aragoz**: Then what?

The Assistant: (aside to Aragoz) That's just his speech … never mind … don't be afraid of him. **The Aragoz**: No. **The Assistant**: (aside to Aragoz) Don't be afraid. **The Aragoz**: (approaches the Berberi) Berberi. **The Berberi**: Yes, sir. **The Aragoz**: Will you work, Berberi? **The Berberi**: Huh? **The Aragoz**: Will you work? **The Berberi**: Huh? **The Aragoz**: Will you work? **The Berberi**: What, sir? **The Aragoz**: (hits him with his stick) Is everything "huh … huh"? **The Berberi**: You should have said so from the morning … yes, I'll work. **The**

Aragoz: Alright … I'm telling you, Berberi. **The Berberi**: Yes? **The Aragoz**: Have you eaten or not yet? **The Berberi**: It's been 12 years, I haven't eaten. **The Aragoz**: (to the assistant) Master … the man hasn't eaten for 12 years. (to the Berberi) Hey, Berberi. **The Berberi**: Yes? **The Aragoz**: Sit here … until I bring you something to eat. **The Berberi**: (sits) We've sat, sir. (Aragoz disappears) (to the assistant) Believe me … my master is a good man. **The Assistant**: Yes, he's very good. **The Berberi**: By God Almighty … a good man. I told him it's been 12 years since I ate … and I just ate an hour ago from the Friday gathering. Here we are.

We sat … he brings the food … we eat and that's it. **The Aragoz**: (appears) Berberi. **The Berberi**: (to Aragoz) Yes? **The Aragoz**: Get up, get up. **The Berberi**: Why? **The Aragoz**: Get up, Berberi … so I can bring you a chair and a table. **The Berberi**: We Berberis are used to eating on the ground … no chair or table. **The Aragoz**: Get up, Berberi, so I can clean the floor for you. **The Berberi**: (gets up) We've risen. **The Aragoz**: (hits the ground with his stick) Sit now, Berberi. **The Berberi**: Then where's the chair and table? **The Aragoz**: (hits him) Are you worthy of a chair and table? … Sit. **The Berberi**: (sits) We've sat, sir. **The Aragoz**: Get up. **The Berberi**: (gets up) We've risen, sir. **The Aragoz**: Sit down again … sit. **The Berberi**: (annoyed) We've sat, sir. **The Assistant**: (to Aragoz) Aragoz. **The Aragoz**: Yes? **The Assistant**: (to Aragoz) Shame on you, Aragoz … shame on you making him get up and sit down like this … you've worn out his knees. **The Aragoz**: (to the assistant) You sit there quiet … mind your own business. (to the Berberi) Sit, Berberi. **The Berberi**: (to Aragoz) By God Almighty, sir … I am already sitting. **The Aragoz**: Hey Berberi, sit … have some sense. **The Berberi**: And I tell you … not sitting means not sitting.

The Aragoz: (losing patience) Hey Berberi, sit. **The Berberi**: Not sitting. **The Aragoz**: (forces him to sit) Sit down, there. **The Berberi**: (gets up) Not sitting. **The Aragoz**: (forces him to sit) Sit means sit … Berberi. **The Berberi**: (gets up) Not sitting. **The Aragoz**: Patience, please. **The Assistant**: (to the spectators) Both of them are stubborn as each other. **The Aragoz**: (taps his hand with his stick) Sit, Berberi … sit. **The Berberi**: By God Almighty, I'm not sitting … (surprised) Did you bring that stick to hit me? **The Aragoz**: (commanding) Hey Berberi, sit. **The Berberi**: Not sitting. **The Aragoz**: (hits him with the

stick) Sit. **The Berberi**: (sits) I've sat … **The Aragoz**: Get up again, get up. **The Berberi**: Not rising. **The Aragoz**: (hits him) Get up. **The Berberi**: (gets up) I've risen. **The Aragoz**: Get up. **The Berberi**: (gets up) Sit down. **The Aragoz**: Sit down. **The Berberi**: (sits) (The Aragoz keeps ordering him and the Berberi keeps sitting and getting up) **The Berberi**: Have mercy on me, sir … electricity has entered my head. **The Aragoz**: Hey, Berberi. **The Berberi**: Yes?

The Aragoz: Take this stick … to look after my house. (He gives him the stick.) **The Berberi**: We take this stick … to look after the house? **The Aragoz**: Yes. **The Berberi**: If a thief passes by? **The Aragoz**: Beat him to death. **The Berberi**: One with a red cap? **The Aragoz**: Break him. **The Berberi**: (pointing to the stick) What's this? **The Aragoz**: This is a stick (nabbut). **The Berberi**: Here in our country, we call it a club (zagla). **The Aragoz**: And I said stick. **The Berberi**: (strikes the stick on the ground) Zagla means zagla. **The Aragoz**: Nabbut … means nabbut. **The Berberi**: Zagla. **The Aragoz**: Nabbut. **The Berberi**: (hits him with the stick) Zagla. **The Aragoz**: Damn your house … zagla … zagla. (a moment of silence) Alright, keep the nabbut with you (he notices) the zagla … and look after the house. **The Berberi**: If a thief passes by or one with a red cap? **The Aragoz**: Break his neck. **The Berberi**: (hits Aragoz on the head) And what's this! **The Aragoz**: Shame, Berberi … to hit your master. **The Berberi**: Accursed. **The Aragoz**: Your father … (disappears)

The Berberi: (to the assistant) You, sheikha. **The Assistant**: Yes? **The Berberi**: We didn't eat food… nor drink drink… without forgiveness, without bother… sheikha, sleep. (He lies down.) **The Assistant**: (to Aragoz) Aragoz. **The Aragoz**: (appears) Yes? **The Assistant**: The Berberi is asleep. **The Aragoz**: Oh ho… what a forgiveness! **The Assistant**: Sneak it away and wake him up. **The Aragoz**: What if I can't sneak it? **The Assistant**: Learn. **The Aragoz**: Isn't stealing forbidden? **The Assistant**: You won't be stealing from a stranger… it's your own money. **The Aragoz**: Alright. (sings) Cover us, O Concealer… and don't reveal secrets. (Aragoz tries to steal the stick from the Berberi – but the Berberi wakes up) **The Berberi**: Huh? (Aragoz disappears without the Berberi seeing him) (to himself) Ah, my eye… you go to sleep… a thief will come and kill you… (yawns) Leave it to God… sheikha, sleep. (He

sleeps. Aragoz sneaks in again.) **The Aragoz**: (to the assistant) Do you think I can steal it from him? **The Assistant**: Try. (The assistant beats his drum, producing a rhythm for the song.) **The Aragoz**: (produces a tone with his voice and sings): Oh you who tired us for years in his love… pretending he doesn't know us, after all this time with him… he passed us by and said he'd return and didn't. And now when I meet him… his eye doesn't look down at mine.

Not even "how are you," he found it too much… found it too much, he couldn't say it… he wasted my heart and I left for nothing. **The Berberi**: (wakes up suddenly) Stop there. **The Aragoz**: (raises his hand and says "Allahu Akbar") God is Great… God is Great. **The Berberi**: (to the assistant) What's this? **The Assistant**: (to the Berberi) Someone's praying. **The Berberi**: Praying or a thief? **The Assistant**: Praying. **The Berberi**: (to Aragoz) Are you praying? **The Aragoz**: Yes, by God, I'm praying. **The Berberi**: Alright, pray… (goes back to sleep) **The Aragoz**: (continues the song while trying to steal the stick) Not even "how are you," he found it too much, couldn't say it… he wasted my heart… he wasted my heart and I left for nothing. **The Berberi**: (wakes up suddenly) Wait a minute. **The Aragoz**: (as if supplicating) Prayers and peace be upon you… O Messenger of God. **The Berberi**: (to the assistant) Still praying? **The Assistant**: Yes, he's praying. **The Berberi**: (to Aragoz) Enough, pray. (He sleeps. Aragoz approaches him. The Berberi wakes up suddenly.) (to Aragoz) Bah… **The Aragoz**: (sings to the well-known tune of the azan): I intend to escape … I intend to escape. **The Berberi**: (to Aragoz) Escape where to? **The Aragoz**: To the house. **The Berberi**: Ah, on you, you son of a woman. **The Aragoz**: Your father's head … they planted it in the mud. **The Berberi**: There you are… (hits Aragoz) I see you.

The Aragoz: (imitating him) And I'll… **The Berberi**: We've caught you… **The Aragoz**: Your father's tax… and… and… look. (The Berberi turns his back – Aragoz hits him on the nape – this movement repeats – until the Berberi discovers it – then he hits Aragoz with the stick.) **The Aragoz**: (puts his hand on his head) Ah, my head, oh man. (The Berberi sleeps, so Aragoz manages to seize the stick.) (to the assistant) I stole it… (He hits the Berberi) … Berberi … get up … (the Berberi runs) (He sings) … Night … night … what a night, oh

peace. **Children**: (sing) Night … night … night … what a night, oh peace. **The Aragoz**: (sings): Oh moon of the nights … shining up high, night … night … night … night night oh peace. **Children**: (sing) Night … night … night … night night oh peace. **The Aragoz**: (sings) Oh night … oh night. **The Assistant**: (sings) From my great love, I pray for you … and I always pray, I pray for you. Flew upon … flew upon … flew upon her once. **The Aragoz**: (sings) O Lord, O Guide … keep my children for me so I can raise them. Their numbers beside me… a blessing from my Lord… O Lord, keep them. My father's favor is great. Flew upon … flew upon her once. And people are many, let's go… and I'm in love with God. Bless them for us. (End)

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3 - Summary of the play (Aragoz and the Undertaker):

The Aragoz finds a (dead person) in the neighborhood where he lives. While he is teasing the assistant, the undertaker appears in his distinctive attire, saying:

The Undertaker: Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. (He replies to himself) And upon you be peace and God's mercy and blessings. **The Aragoz**: And upon you be peace and God's mercy and blessings. **The Undertaker**: I smell the scent of drum and reed and a marriage contract. **The Aragoz**: On the contrary … we have a dead person here. **The Undertaker**: One hundred and one? (The Arabic play on words: "mayit" dead, "miya" hundred)

The Aragoz: Man, it's one. **The Undertaker**: Two hundred and one?

(This bidding by the undertaker continues until the number reaches two thousand.)

The Undertaker: Do you think I carry by the one? **The Aragoz**: Then what? **The Undertaker**: I carry by the country, by the two countries – by the tin, by the two tins – by the stroke, by the two strokes.

(The Aragoz fears for his life from the undertaker and disappears. The undertaker then proceeds to mock the assistant – Aragoz's friend. After that, the Aragoz steals the corpse while

the undertaker goes to pray. Aragoz buries the corpse himself. When Aragoz returns, he finds the assistant, who asks him):

The Assistant: Where's the dead person who was here?

The Aragoz: I didn't see him. **The Assistant**: How could you not see him… weren't you standing here? **The Aragoz**: I was standing, but I didn't see him. **The Assistant**: Wasn't there a dead person here? **The Aragoz**: Yes. **The Assistant**: Alright … where is he? **The Aragoz**: Search me. **The Assistant**: Do you think you could hide him in your pocket?! **The Aragoz**: Alright, sniff then. **The Assistant**: Did you eat him?!! Anyway, die in his place. (After several attempts by Aragoz to escape this situation, he finally submits and lies on the ground as if he is dead.) (The undertaker finishes praying and appears to take the corpse.) **The Undertaker**: (pointing to Aragoz) What's this? **The Assistant**: The dead person. **The Undertaker**: This is the dead person?! **The Assistant**: Yes. **The Undertaker**: (to Aragoz) You're the dead person? **The Aragoz**: (while lying on the ground) Yes. **The Undertaker**: (to the assistant) This one is talking! **The Assistant**: Is there a dead person who talks!! That boy who passed by, he's the one who talked. (The assistant and the undertaker argue about the real dead person's appearance. Finally, the undertaker carries Aragoz after being convinced by the assistant's talk. Aragoz jumps off the undertaker's shoulder, hits him, and expels him.)

A section of the spectator crowd of the folk Aragoz theatre

The Aragoz singing the opening of one of his theatrical performances

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4 - Summary of the play (Aragoz and the Sa'idi):

(After the Aragoz and the assistant finish their sung introduction, a Sa'idi man appears in his distinctive attire, asking Aragoz.)

The Sa'idi: Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. **The Aragoz**: And upon you be peace and God's mercy and blessings. **The Sa'idi**: What do you have here? **The Aragoz**: We have a wedding. **The Sa'idi**: Do you have dates? (balah) **The Aragoz**: Man, we have a night (leila). **The Sa'idi**: Do you eat balila? (a dish) **The Aragoz**: (pointing towards the children) What, man … don't you see the guests! **The Sa'idi**: All these are guests? **The Aragoz**: Man, they're invited. **The Sa'idi**: Are you saying they're hungry (ja'a)? (mishearing) **The Aragoz**: Man … don't you see the decorations! **The Sa'idi**: Are you going to the gas station (benzina)? **The Aragoz**: Alright, don't you see the lights! **The Sa'idi**: Are you saying scorpions (agarb)? (After an argument of this type.) **The Aragoz**: What's your job? **The Sa'idi**: Artist. **The Aragoz**: Alright, let us hear you. **The Sa'idi**: (sings in a repulsive voice) Oh night … oh my eye … oh night. (The Sa'idi keeps singing. The Aragoz puts his hands on

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his ears … then tries to silence him by putting his hands over the Sa'idi's mouth … and finally is guided to using the stick and silences the Sa'idi by hitting him on the head … without being seen.)

The Sa'idi: (to Aragoz) I was singing and happy … I don't know what fell on my head from above! **The Aragoz**: Must be people demolishing. **The Sa'idi**: What should I tell them? **The Aragoz**: Tell them: O folks, be light and tasteful, it's the duty of those above to watch out for those below … and those below to watch out for those above. **The Sa'idi**: (repeats what the Aragoz told him) (The Aragoz repeats hitting the Sa'idi with the stick on the nape without the latter noticing.) **The Sa'idi**: Who are those, then? **The Aragoz**: Those must be the municipality people. **The Sa'idi**: (looks upward) O folks up there … O people of politeness, it's the duty of those above to watch out for those below … (The Aragoz hits him without the Sa'idi noticing.) What's this? **The Aragoz**: The alley must be haunted! **The Sa'idi**: What do you mean? **The Aragoz**: It's got a ghost. **The Sa'idi**: Does it have a picture? **The Aragoz**: Yes. **The Sa'idi**: I seek refuge in God from the apricot. **The Aragoz**: This seems to be a ghost that loves romance … sing for him. (The Sa'idi begins to sing, and the children and assistant respond. Meanwhile, Aragoz tries to scare the Sa'idi in various

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ways … and finally the Sa'idi discovers it.)

The Sa'idi: It's you! Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings, four times in advance … **The Aragoz**: And upon you be peace and God's mercy and blessings … to friends and the good, twenty times delayed. **The Sa'idi**: Are you upset, shall I unwind you? **The Aragoz**: So I'm tied up? **The Sa'idi**: Shall I say a turn (dor)? **The Aragoz**: Say … say, stuff your father's soul.

(The Sa'idi sings strange words in a repulsive voice … and the Aragoz exchanges with him through rhyme, singing songs that mock the first one's songs. The Aragoz tries to silence the Sa'idi to no avail … he resorts to his stick … hits him, and expels him.)

5 - Summary of the play (Aragoz and the Two Brothers Haduqa and Hamouda):

The Aragoz and his assistant present their sung introduction. After they finish, "Hamouda" appears – who is Aragoz's neighbor – mocking the Aragoz. This verbal battle ends in a physical fight. A passerby intervenes – a stranger to Aragoz's area – and separates them. When the Aragoz asks his name, the man tells him his name is "Haduqa". Hamouda notices the name and inquires about some information regarding his background and his childhood. Haduqa tells him he got lost from his family when he was still young, and only remembers that his father worked in a certain trade. Here, Hamouda reveals his identity to him and tells him that he is his brother. The play ends happily.

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6 - Summary of the play (Aragoz and the Thief):

The foreigner (khawaga) searches for an honest man to work as a "transport man" for a money bag between the foreigner's shops and the bank. The choice falls on Aragoz, who applies for this job.

Aragoz takes the bag full of money from the shops, and goes to the bank where he finds a "long queue" in which he stands. As soon as he reaches the bank clerk's window, the latter

tells him that official working hours are over and tells him to come tomorrow at ten in the morning to deposit the amount.

On his way home, Aragoz meets the assistant, and the two begin exchanging “rhymes.” While they are busy with this banter, a thief passes by and steals the bag. Aragoz searches for the bag beside him but cannot find it. Meanwhile, the foreigner has informed the police of Aragoz’s theft of the bag. The policeman arrests Aragoz and takes him to the “lock-up.” Aragoz manages to escape from prison, searches for the thief until he finds him, and hands him over to the police with the money bag in his possession. The foreigner receives it, and Aragoz is released.

Chapter Two

The Arab Folk Theatre

The Arabic Play - 65

The view of our Arab folk theatrical performances was previously dismissive among scholars of dramatic art, until the call arose to establish an Arab theatre with an Arab identity in the early 1960s. The proponents of this call directed their appeal to researchers and artists, urging them to research our Arab artistic heritage to find the elements that represent the particularity of spectacle among the Arabs. Thus, most scholars acknowledged the importance of the arts of spectacle among the Arabs, such as Shadow Play, Aragoz, The World Box (Sanduq al-Dunya), and the Rebab Poet. Some considered them seeds for the art of theatre, while others called them theatrical phenomena.

This disagreement among scholars requires study and investigation into the reality of Arab folk spectacle performances: for the word “seeds” or the expression “phenomena” indicates the degree of congruity between these artistic forms and dramatic art. Either these artistic forms are theatre, or they are something else. If these folk artistic performances have found popularity among the various Arab peoples, what are the common features shared by all of them?

A Return to the basics of dramatic art:

It is not correct to stand before a human phenomenon or one of the human social activities in a stance akin to the frozen camera lens, which transmits this phenomenon or activity in a photographic manner devoid of clarifying the purpose for which it existed, or the essence through which human activities remain alive and

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pulsating. Especially since the art of theatre is an art that encompasses within its fold an aesthetic form and an intellectual essence and an overflow of feelings and emotions. If we

wish to judge whether a community produces theatrical performances or not, we seek thereby the fundamental elements by which we define dramatic art. We are like a researcher seeking to know the human being – the matter – through its bare skeletal framework, away from the color of skin, eyes, or hair. We thereby wish to search for the truth of the thing / theatre in general without delving into the details by which the theatre of the Easterners differs from that of the Westerners.

If we study dramatic art – as a bare human activity – without paying attention to the details most closely linked to the national identity of theatre, we will find that dramatic art rests on four basic pillars: the performer – the spectators – the thought or subject – the live encounter in a place.

First: The Performer – the Actor:

The term (Actor) is defined lexicographically as "one who performs a character in a dramatic performance, or one who professes acting." If we disregard the condition of professionalism, we are – according to this definition – before two fundamental factors for the occurrence of the act of acting or performing:

- The first: A person: who has his own selfhood and independent identity, present with body, thought, and feelings, enjoying freedom in inventing appropriate performance.
- The second: A character: which also has its own selfhood and independent identity, expressed through the written role, and performed via the actor[^10].

Therefore, the precise translation of the word Actor here is (the performer), and the translation of the process of Acting is not merely the deed but rather (performing), meaning that a person presents a character through performing. In order for the performer to present a character,

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he either presents it through the word: the vocal performance expressing the character's thought and psychological state, or through the image: gesture and movement, or through both together. This is what we will study in Arab folk spectacle performances.

Second: The Spectators:

The spectator, with his aesthetic taste and intellectual beliefs, is the one that gives the theatrical process its local color, and the one that imparts to it the factor of particularity and locality. The spectator dictates the nature of the reception process and the mechanisms of spectacle. He may express his approval by clapping, whistling, scattering flowers, words of praise, or complete silence. He may also express his rejection and lack of appreciation for what he sees by shouting, throwing solid objects at the actors, or leaving the performance hall.

What matters is that he expresses his approval or disapproval of the theatrical performance in all corners of the earth. This is what may encourage the performers or alert them that they have gone outside the circle of interest.

Civilizational circumstances are what build the spectator in a special (intellectual and aesthetic) construction. They are the same circumstances that force the creative artist to direct his creative channels within the limits of the intellectual and aesthetic framework of the spectator.

This justifies the French audience's non-acceptance of the works of the English author William Shakespeare (1564-1616) when his plays were performed in Paris in the eighteenth century. They considered the use of words like "mouse" or "handkerchief" a violation of the general taste of the French audience! Hence, we do not judge either side (Shakespeare's drama and the French audience) as one being sublime and the other primitive; rather, in fairness, we account for every artistic product within the limits of its spectators' intellectual and aesthetic circumstances.

Third: Thought – Subject:

The third pillar of the theatrical process is the pillar of (thought – subject). We cannot imagine a performer performing dramatic actions without the condition of thought, however superficial, and a subject containing characters, however improvised.

The art of theatrical spectacle, however devoid of preparation and readiness, and however characterized by spontaneity and improvisation, is an art that contains the aesthetics of a

subject that presents within its folds an intellectual and emotional current from the performer to the spectator.

If we look carefully at all dramatic forms, we will find that they contain several fundamental elements, all of which enter – in the language of media professionals – under the name (the artistic message), or at the very least under the name (thought – subject). These elements are:

1. A character who has a desire to achieve some goal, mediated by helper characters, to reach this goal.
2. Characters or circumstances – subjective or objective – that form obstacles to prevent the main character from reaching their goal.
3. The character has self-expression, articulated by them, expressing their state and providing some information about their intentions.
4. There is a borrowing of the place where the characters live, either embodied – as in Western theatre – or borrowed through narration – as in Eastern theatre generally.
5. There is a borrowing of the time in which events take place, expressed either by transitioning in time directly – as in Western theatre – where we understand from the following dialogue that we are about to undergo a temporal shift, or by referring to it – as in Eastern theatre generally.

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6 - There are events that express the character in a state of action. All these elements are present in any subject of theatrical spectacle, whether from Western theatre, Far Eastern theatre, or ancient Arab theatre, as we shall see.

Fourth: Place – The Live Encounter:

Live theatrical spectacle cannot take place without a place that brings together the three pillars we have just presented, in a single moment, which is the moment of spectacle itself, away from determining the nature of this place, its shape, its relationship with the spectator, and the spectator’s relationship with the spectacle. Whether it is an Italian theatre (proscenium theatre) or a circular theatre or otherwise, the existence of the pillar of place to create a live

encounter between artist and spectator is one of the necessities of the theatrical spectacle process.

These four pillars: (the performer, the spectator, the thought/subject, and the place/live encounter) are among the most important fundamentals upon which theatrical work rises. If the theatrical process lacks one of them, the theatrical process as a whole is negated, and consequently the concepts of theatrical spectacle and the functions upon which it rests are lost.

The Basics of Theatre and Arab Folk Performances.

First: The Performer:

The element of the performer exists in the arts of: Shadow Play, Aragoz, and the Rebab Poet. If we look at the art of (Shadow Play), we will find that “acting in it was done through mediation: by means of pictures moved by the players, who spoke, stood, danced, conversed, fought, and made up on behalf of them all”[^11].

Thus, the direct performance here will be – without doubt – through vocal performance. The performer enacts the characters vocally, by performing their emotions: sadness, anger, joy, etc. Therefore, the performer of the Shadow Play art must possess the ability for vocal performance, in order to give the visual aesthetic image – which casts its shadow on the white screen – a living character. The performer here does not express the state of a reciter but rather performs – through the process of representation – another character. Therefore, he changes his voice levels to suit the character he is presenting. Hence, we can say that the element of the performer exists in the art of (Shadow Play).

The same applies to the art of Aragoz, where the performer is present directly with his voice, and indirectly through the puppet. It is necessary for the performer in the art of Aragoz – like his counterpart in Shadow Play – to possess multiple talents, “for performing the text required different voices, and even different dialects”[^12], because the characters of the performance belong to various nationalities. Often, singing was also required, and during the performance one heard the sounds of slaps and the commotion of scuffling, and for this reason

the performer had to leave one hand free in order to strike his forehead with it to produce these sounds…"[^13]. Direct vocal performance is an element that requires proficiency in vocal coloring, to express the various situations of the characters. The Aragoz performer must also be skilled in expression with his hands while moving the glove puppet, in a way that synchronizes with the vocal performance, so that the puppet appears alive, moving and expressing the character as much as possible. Therefore, the existence of the element (the performer) is beyond doubt, and there is no argument about his ability to entertain his spectators by portraying characters in their different situations.

In the case of the (Rebab Poet) or (the Storyteller), he is a direct performer, who embodies the different characters and performs them with different dialects and voice levels

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and different emotions and movements, emanating from the situations and portraying them. He lends his capabilities and being to every character he portrays in every situation, exactly as the actor lends his capabilities and being to the character he plays in every situation he goes through[^14].

Therefore, the Rebab Poet must possess certain characteristics that enable him to perform well, in poetry and prose, with good pronunciation and sound, and the availability of a clear voice and convincing, effective performance, as well as his ability to play the instrument and to convincingly form muscles, whether in the facial muscles or the general formation of the body’s muscles[^15].

The Rebab Poet performs all the characters he encounters in a dramatic performance. Thus, he distinguishes in his performance between the distinct gestures and voice of one character from another. He is a unique performer who owns nothing but his distinctive performing skill to impress his audience, so that they reward him generously. This ultimately indicates the existence of the performer element in the art of (the Rebab Poet), just as it exists in the arts of (Aragoz) and (Shadow Play).

Second: The Spectators – The Audience:

The Arab spectator carries a set of intellectual legacies and aesthetic traditions that have determined the nature of receiving the artistic message. These legacies and traditions have required that the spectator have ultimate control over the nature of the work presented to him. This is for several reasons:

(a) There are no laws to regulate the spectator; the only law that applied in folk performances was that the artist presents what the spectator desires. (b) The folk theatrical performance – in most cases – is what goes to the places where the spectators are. Therefore, the element of sovereignty belongs to the spectator, not the artist.

© The spectator does not pay the fee – in most performances – unless he likes and approves of the performance. The one who determines the amount paid is the spectator himself. It is established in studies that have dealt with Arab folk theatrical performances that these arts found popularity among the ancient Arab spectator[^16].

Third: Thought – Subject:

We mentioned in our discussion of the element of (thought – subject) that there are six elements present in the visual and aural subject of the theatrical process, in order for us to call it a theatrical work. We can study these elements in light of folk theatrical performances as follows:

(a) The character and its dramatic goal that it seeks to achieve: The character enters the dramatic work for the purpose of achieving some goal. If the character achieves its goal – the goal of the main character – then we are dealing with a theatrical work of the comedy type. If it is unable to do so, or dies in the pursuit of achieving a noble goal, this theatrical work becomes of the tragedy type. If we look at a playlet from Shadow Play, such as the playlet (The Phantom of Imagination) which scholars attribute to (Ibn Daniyal), we will find that the hero character (Prince Wisal) announces his desire and dramatic goal in the opening of the playlet. It is this desire that he will seek to achieve throughout the various dramatic situations of this work. He announces this desire, saying to Umm Rashid: “I have only asked you to marry me off, and to no one else do I want you to resort. I want this bride to be pearl-colored,

beautiful in form, well-proportioned in body, neither thin nor excessively plump, smooth-cheeked, firm-breasted… etc.”[^17].

The desire of Prince Wisal is clear here. Therefore, the spectator can trace its path within the network of dramatic desires of the dramatic work as a whole. The reason for this tracking and interest by the spectator is his stimulation by an element of dramatic suspense, represented by posing a question whose content is: Will Prince Wisal’s desire be fulfilled? And how?

If we search for this element in (the art of Aragoz), we will find that his dramatic desire, in most of his performances, is that the Aragoz is in a state of happiness and joy at the beginning of the performance, but a person intervenes (represented by the Berberi or the beggar or other characters) and disrupts the peace of the Aragoz’s life. The Aragoz’s goal and dramatic desire is to remove this strange person, so that the Aragoz may return to his state of singing and ecstasy.

As for (the Rebab Poet) or (the Storyteller), he presents heroic characters carrying within them a sublime dramatic desire: either to avenge the blood of the wronged sherif, in order to reclaim their rights and dignity, as in the epic of (Abu Zayd al-Hilali) or (Dhat al-Himma), or they are asked for a difficult request to achieve the desire of union with the beloved, as in the epic of (Antarah ibn Shaddad). The latter announces his dramatic desire to marry his beloved and cousin (Abla). Here, the same question we posed earlier is raised: Will our hero achieve his dramatic desire? And how?

(b) Obstacles preventing the hero from achieving his goal:

The conflict of characters’ dramatic desires generates dramatic conflict within the theatrical process. This conflict generates in the spectator the pleasure of viewing through stimulation by the factor of suspense or anticipation. If we examine the model we presented for the art of (Shadow Play) from the playlet (The Phantom of Imagination), we find that the obstacles standing in the way of achieving (Prince Wisal)'s desire are embodied in the behaviors of (Umm Rashid) towards him[^18]. Therefore, the spectator, knowing from

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(Umm Rashid) that she “will double-cross him,” begins to follow the journey of (Prince Wisal) in his pursuit of marriage. This is what also stirs the comic sense in the spectator.

As for (the art of Aragoz), the obstacles are often embodied in another character or characters such as (the beggar – the Berberi) in the plays (Aragoz and the Beggar) and (Aragoz and the Berberi). They disturb the Aragoz’s peace. As a result of the Aragoz’s generosity and his enjoyment of all that is good, he is drawn into the problems of these characters. But as soon as he learns of any deception from them, he turns on them with his stick, pushing them out of his world.

Obstacles appear more maturely in (the Rebab Poet), where we find subjective obstacles (related to the character’s abilities) and objective obstacles (embodied in counter-desires of persons or obstacles represented in things) in a defined and convincing form simultaneously. As for obstacles represented in antagonistic characters, they are embodied in desires conflicting with the hero’s desire. These characters – in most works – are characters that incline towards exploitation, injustice, and tyranny. In the epic of (Antarah ibn Shaddad), we find subjective obstacles and others objective. The subjective ones are represented in that Antarah’s color is black, while the objective obstacles are represented in the social traditions that recognize slavery on one hand, and the value of the dowry demanded by his uncle (set at one thousand red she-camels) on the other hand. There are obstacles he encounters on his way to earn these camels, represented in shifting sands, piracy, … etc.

© Dialogue – Language:

Dialogue is one of the important mediums of dramatic expression. It transmits to us the state of the characters and the focus of their concerns, and it reveals the goal they are pursuing. If we examine this element in our folk theatre arts – which we have presented – we find it present in all of them. The language varies among them: in (Shadow Play) it is classical

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Arabic, often sung. In the (Aragoz) theatre, it is colloquial, also interspersed with songs. As for the art of (the Rebab Poet), the language is mostly classical and sung. This leads us to say that a common denominator among folk spectacle arts is apparent: they contain sung passages, with varying lengths between one art and another.

(d) Borrowing of place and time:

In (Shadow Play) performances, we find two levels of time and place: the first is the time and place of the visual event; the other concerns borrowing an incident through narration, performed by one of the characters, which entails borrowing the time and place of the incident, through description, not embodiment.

In (Aragoz) performances, we find the incident present before the eyes of the spectators, carrying with it its own time and place. They are rarely borrowed descriptively. In one of the incidents of this art's performances – as in the two plays published in this book – we are before the Aragoz's house as place, and the present as time. As for the art of (the Rebab Poet), past and present time and place are often borrowed through descriptive narration.

(e) Event – Action:

This is the most important feature of the theatrical performance. Action is characterized by the existence of a visual situation that brings together two or more characters with their time and place here-and-now – the scene. If we examine our Arab spectacle arts (Shadow Play – Aragoz – Rebab Poet), we find actions present in them. Prince Wisal in The Phantom of Imagination rejoices and suffers before our eyes. The Aragoz in the play Aragoz and the Berberi, for example, disciplines the Berberi before our eyes. And this is the Rebab Poet embodying Antarah in his wars, holding his sword, with the narrator expressing it by means of the bow of the rebab.

They are visual dramatic actions, and they collectively form the event watched by the spectator.

Fourth: Place – The Live Encounter:

The place in our folk spectacle performances is the very place where the audience resides, such as: large cafes, popular districts, and gathering places on the occasions of mulids and holidays. They are places teeming with crowds. The spectacle artist goes to them carrying his tools, whether the carts of shadow play and Aragoz, or carrying his rebab as in the case of the

Rebab Poet. The place imposes its own traditions for dealing with both parties of the spectacle: the spectator and the artist. The former – as we presented before – is the master of the place. Therefore, he only watches what captures his attention, not what the artist wants alone. Because the fee is deferred in some of these performances, the artist does what he can to win the mind and conscience of the spectator, in order to guarantee a satisfactory material gain at the end of the performance. Therefore, the nature of this relationship has imposed a specific particularity on the art itself, namely the particularity of (improvisation). The spectator sometimes intervenes in the course of the game, and the artist must take the spectator's line and build upon it and support it. Thus, depending on the spectator, situations that concern him explode, and a language in which the artist wishes to address him. This explains why, in poor areas, the performance was characterized by coarseness and obscenity, while among notables it was more gentle and polite[^19]. Because the artist of spectacle performances was always moving from one town to another, and from one district to another, in pursuit of his audience, he might learn of a specific incident in this or that place and then explode a similar improvised situation. He might mock the actions of a known figure in this town after changing their name to a similar linguistic meter, like Sa'fan and Sha'ban. This also justifies the tendency of such performances towards satire, insult, worn-out customs and traditions, as well as points of human weakness[^20], in line with the spectator's conscience and the nature of their concerns.

The folk spectacle artist purges the spectator of his anger towards surrounding circumstances by monitoring this concern, rising above it, and mocking the causes that led to it.

Conclusion:

We conclude from our concise study that Arab folk spectacle arts carry the fundamentals of dramatic art, and they are not a (phenomenon) as some scholars wish to label them. The Arab folk theatrical spectacle performances arose, flourished, and extended in time and space, just like the ancient Greek theatre, which lasted no more than five centuries among its people, or the (Noh) theatre which has existed since the fifteenth century AD until now. Our Arab theatre is, naturally, a theatre in agreement with all theatrical models in their common

foundations, which we summarized here in four points: (the performer – the spectator – the subject – the live encounter). Even if our Arab theatre differs from the theatre of the Far East and the theatre of the Westerners in some details, this is natural. The theatre of the ancient Greeks differs from the theatre of the Far East, and these two differ from European theatre today, as these fine details in which each theatrical entity differs from another are part of the theatre's national mission and the basis of its local character.

If we detail the results specific to the general features of the various Arab theatre arts (Shadow Play – Aragoz – Rebab Poet), we arrive at the particularity of this theatre and its characteristics that distinguish it from other national theatre arts. We can present these general features of our ancient Arab theatre as follows:

First: The element of the performer in all of them carries significant tasks in its acting performance: they must have the ability for vocal coloring and the capacity for complete distinction in different voice levels, because they are tasked with performing many characters. They are also required to have a good voice, because they are charged with singing and melodiousness in some dramatic situations. They must be capable – in the case of the Rebab Poet – of having a flexible body and expressive face for physical or gestural expression of the state of the character in its various dramatic situations. And because the performer – as we mentioned earlier – in our ancient Arab theatre plays more than one character in a single theatrical performance, they need a skill in voice and gesture that surpasses the skill of the actor in the standard Western theatre.

Second: The nature of the place where the artist of our ancient Arab theatre presents their performances has imposed a special relationship between the two parties of the spectacle: the spectator – the artist. The axes of this relationship are as follows:

1. Most performances of the ancient Arab theatre – which we have presented – begin with direct address to the spectator, and also end in the same manner.
2. The spectator has the right to determine the course of the performance, to change it, or to choose – as in the art of the Rebab Poet – what they want to hear and see.

3. The artist only presents their ability to imitate the models they are performing, and the spectator does not believe that what they see is reality but rather regards it as a game.
4. The Arab artist presents what touches the reality of the spectator, of concerns and issues, in a caricatural form with the aim of rising above them and mocking them.
5. The method of the performer's performance is a method of suggestion, not illusion.
6. The basic function performed by our authentic Arab theatre is the function of entertainment in the first degree. All performances serve to divert the spectator's soul, and they also educate them in the second degree in the case of the Rebab Poet's theatre.

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7 - Most of our ancient Arab theatrical performances belong to the world of comedy, and we rarely find a tragic subject in them.

These are the general features of our ancient Arab theatre, which distinguish it from other foreign theatre arts. These features are the formula of our Arab theatre, carrying within them the traditions of our theatrical spectacle and the intellectual framework of the audience. Now, can we dispense with the concept of (Arab theatrical phenomena) and adhere to the expression (ancient Arab theatre) which shares with all forms of world theatre the foundations upon which the concept of (theatrical art) rises? Our Arab theatre has lived for ten centuries, lasting among the ancient Arab spectator long before the influx of colonialism into Arab lands by hundreds of years. A purely Arab theatre with its own artists, spectators, and characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of theatrical expression.

Footnotes of Part One

[^1]: See our book – *The Theatre of Naguib Sorour: The Dramatic Employment of Forms of Folk Literature* (مسرح نجيب سرور : التوظيف الدرامي لأشكال الأدب الشعبي). Cairo: Madbouly Library, 1989. [^2]: See – Mukhtar al-Suweifi: *Shadow Play and Puppets in the World* (خيال الظل والعرائس في العالم). Cairo: Arab Writer Publishing House, 1967 – p. 81. [^3]: This text was collected from one of the Aragoz performances held on the morning of Eid al-Adha in Old Cairo. [^4]: These verses are the opening of a song by the late artist "Fayza Ahmed". [^5]: This is the name of the Aragoz player. [^6]: Shootsh: A term used in Egyptian circles for the cart whose riders hunt stray dogs; its origin seems to be the English word "Shoot". [^7]: The Berberi speaks – during this play – in the Berberi language close to the Berberi language as portrayed in old Egyptian cinema films. [^8]: Ramadan: is the real name of the assistant. [^9]: This play was collected on a Friday in Old Cairo. [^10]: See our study – *The Dramatic Character between the Pillars of the Role and the Artistry of the Actor's Performance* (الشخصية الدرامية بين مرتكزات الدور وفنية أداء الممثل), in "Teatro 93" Magazine, Issue (4). Cairo: The Acting Professions Syndicate, June 1993 – pp. 54-63. [^11]: Dr. Ali al-Ra'i: *Theatre among the Arabs in Ancient Times (a study)* (المسرح عند العرب قديماً), in "Kitab al-Arabi", Issue (18). Kuwait: Dar al-Arabi, January 1988, p. 25. [^12]: Review the Aragoz theatre texts in this book. [^13]: Tamara Alexandrovna: *One Thousand and One Years of Arab Theatre* (ألف عام وعام على المسرح العربي). Translation: Tawfiq al-Mu'adhin. Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1981 – p. 88. [^14]: Ali Uqla Ursan: *Theatrical Phenomena among the Arabs* (الظواهر المسرحية عند العرب). Damascus: Arab Writers Union, 3rd ed., 1985 – p. 679.

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[^15]: Previous reference, p. 680. [^16]: See – Tamara Alexandrovna: Previous reference, 89, 94. [^17]: Dr. Ibrahim Hamada: *Shadow Play and the Playlets of Ibn Daniyal* (خيال الظل وتمثليات بن دانيال). Cairo: The Egyptian General Organization for Publishing, n.d. – p. 162. [^18]: See – previous reference – p. 176. [^19]: Tamara Alexandrovna: Previous reference, p. 89. [^20]: Previous reference – p. 89.

Part Two

The Arabic Play

Artistic Falseness

Chapter One

The Play Al-Farafeer…

and the Call for…

An Arab Theatre

The physician Yousef Idris (1927-1991) published three successive articles in “Al-Katib” magazine under the title “Towards an Egyptian Theatre,” then republished them later as an introduction to his play “Al-Farafeer – 1964.” In them, he presented his theoretical conception of the authentic Egyptian play, which derives its material from the reality of Arab heritage. We can summarize his conception in the following points:

First: Western theatre is merely one of the theatrical forms; it is not the only theatrical form, as evidenced by the theatres of China and Japan, which are two theatres completely different from Western theatre, yet they belong to the world of theatre. Theatre exists in the life of every people, and each people has its own way of expression and its style that springs from its personality.

Second: The necessity of the audience’s participation in the process of (theatricalization). Thus, the audience becomes an active element in the theatricalization process, as its role is not limited to its existence as a passive spectator. Through the theatricalization process in which the audience plays a large part in the creative movement, the spectator of the theatricalization reaches a state of ecstasy, just like a participant in collective songs.

Third: The necessity of emphasizing that the (Samer), (Alley Theatre), (Shadow Play), and (Aragoz) are explicit theatrical forms, and the necessity of benefiting from them, because they are theatrical forms that have lived to express the truth of the Egyptian conscience and its feelings, thoughts, dreams, and hopes.

Fourth: Our adherence to our artistic traditions is not a regression from the civilizational march. We can keep pace with all technological developments while simultaneously adhering to our artistic traditions, just like all civilized peoples such as the English.

Fifth: There is one main role, which is the role of (the Farfour). He is the main axis around which the story revolves, with his attitudes, opinions, and movements, making people laugh, so that it becomes clear to us in the end that the other roles are merely occasions for the "Farfour", for the Farfour to deliver his dialogue or sarcasm, and are not acting roles in the understood sense. The Farfour is a true example of the clever, sarcastic Egyptian novelistic hero, containing within himself all the ability (of Ali al-Zeibaq) and all the talents (of Hamza al-Bahlawan 11). He is a human being sarcastic by nature and disposition; he does not hunt for reaction or pretend what is not in him. He is comical, clownish, wise, and a philosopher at the same time. The real Farfour is the only one capable of standing amidst the crowded audience, speaking and making them laugh. Farfourism is a clear, distinct sign of the signs of (theatricalization) in the form of a Samer. He is that smooth artist, stingingly cunning, who pains without wounds. He, only through his words, his tongue, his great means of conveying the truth, wants to move the collective conscience – without that dry directness that distinguished the Aragoz theatre 11.

Sixth: There is an Egyptian theatre existing in our lives and present, but we do not see it because we want to see it similar and identical to the European theatre that we came to know, translated, adapted, Arabized, and imitated, from the late nineteenth century until the mid-sixties. It is time for us to respect our own self, and what our self produces of arts. We are a complete people, possessing our own songs, music, dances, and theatre[^1].

If (Yousef Idris) set a theoretical framework for his idea towards an Egyptian theatre, he did not spare us a dramatic application model through his play (Al-Farafeer). So, did our author succeed in reconciling what he wrote theoretically with what he created dramatically? … This is what this study tries to answer, through two main axes:

The first: presents the construction of the play Al-Farafeer through an analytical reading of it, thereby attempting to search for Yousef Idris's theorizing in the context of the proposed dramatic structure in his play.

The second: discusses the results of the analytical reading of the play with what we concluded in the first part of this book regarding the general features of the ancient Arab

theatre, in order to find the relationship between his theoretical and creative output and the origins of theatrical spectacle among the Arabs.

Axis One

Yousef Idris's Call "Towards an Egyptian Theatre"

An Analytical Reading of the Play "Al-Farafeer"

The play Al-Farafeer is divided, in terms of its external construction, into two parts. The author indicated that these two parts are not subject to a special order; the first may precede the last, or the last may precede the first. This is what we will address at the end of our analytical reading of the play.

The first part – of the printed play – begins with direct address to the spectator audience, where the character of (the Author) appears to speak directly to the spectator, defining the nature of receiving the theatrical message, saying: "Ladies and gentlemen… good evening and don't worry, I'm not a speaker or anything… I'm the author of the play"[^2].

Then he touches upon the rules of the game and its artistic traditions before the play begins, saying: "There are no actors or spectators in my play. You act a little, and the actors watch a little… We decided tonight to release your suppressed talents… instead of you, sir, playing the role of the dignified spectator"[^3].

(Farfour) enters, interrupting the flow of (the Author)'s words, after making an attempt to tease the spectators with his whip. (Farfour) directs his tongue at the author, mocking him, then soon the former asks the latter to produce (the Master). After a search process among the rows of spectators, (the Author) finds (the Master), sleeping in the theatre seats designated for the spectator audience. (The Author) asks (Farfour) to perform the play well and to wake the sleeping (Master), then leaves him and departs. (Farfour) tries to wake his master, and after stalling, (the Master) wakes up and asks (Farfour) to bring him cigarettes, and to choose a name for him, since the author forgot that. After (Farfour) unleashes his tongue upon (the

Master), calling him names such as: Donkey – Dog – Cat – Thief – Abu Qutab … etc., (the Master) asks (Farfour) to choose a profession for him, since (the Author) forgot to attach him to a profession. (Farfour) – through several dialogue passages – addresses different professions, mocking them in the form of "rhyme," like:

- Intellectual: does nothing.
- Artist: without art.
- Singer: you sit for thirty, forty years saying "Ahh."
- Lyricist: you go to the spice vendor… fill one of your pockets with "the evil eye protector," the other with "words of reproach," and the third with "sleepless nights"… etc.
- Lawyer: you seek refuge in the justice of the court to rule for you… and if it doesn't… we've won the retainer fee.
- Judge: you keep studying cases very well and preparing the legal justifications for them, and then you come to court and adjourn them. We notice that this (rhyme) resembles its counterparts in our daily life, and it is one of the most famous Samer games, and one of the hardest; as it requires an extraordinary ability to concentrate, presence of mind, and experience and practice. (Yousef Idris) uses it here as an equivalent to verbal laughter triggers.

(The Master) objects to all known occupations and jobs, believing that none of the spectators has been prepared for any job he has joined. (Farfour) heads towards the audience, asking them about the truth of this matter. One of the spectators – a written role performed by an actor – stands up, confirming that he is happy with his work. When (Farfour) asks him about the nature of his work, the spectator replies that he is striving to find a job.

It is clear that (Yousef Idris) here touches the vocabulary of the Egyptian spectator's reality on the tongue of the character (Farfour). He mocks the nature of familiar jobs, and he also exposes the mask of unemployment that spread in our Egyptian society since the mid-sixties, and whose danger bells have rung these days.

(The Master) announces that he will work as a grave digger (turbati). Here, Yousef Idris returns again to touching the concerns of the spectator's reality by focusing on some vocabulary of Egyptian daily life, through (the Master)'s statement to his Farfour that he will find his customer – the dead – easily these days, saying:

"Available… nowadays he passes by a street without paying attention… rides a ferry… drives a lorry and holds his breath twice… goes to Demerdash Hospital… because Qasr al-Aini is no use… the patient dies before he enters it"[^4].

In an attempt by (the Master) to inquire about the concept of the word (gada' / brave one), (Farfour) lures him in, and in the end declares to him that there is no brave one, then says to him:

"Here… I tricked you… and took the henna from your hands"[^5].

A phrase often said by a deceitful child, within the reference framework of our Egyptian spectator.

The play addresses the idea of (the master and the slave) as we know it when we read about human civilizations in their various eras, through a similar concept that our author here called (the master and the farfour). This idea becomes clear for the first time in the play when the master announces to Farfour that he will work as a grave digger, and that he will receive all his material rights in return for performing all the duties of this work. But he soon abandons applying this idea practically, ordering Farfour to dig instead of him, while the master enjoys all the material rights resulting from this work. Farfour objects to this proposal, but the master confirms that he is a master who does not work, and that only the Farfour works, with the material returns of this work going to the master in the end. He stresses that his role as Farfour does not exceed working, and that it is the very role that (the Author) wanted for him, then he calls the author to confirm this thesis. The author enters and orders Farfour to act according to all his master's commands, then leaves, returning to his work. Here, the master begins to impose his control over Farfour by issuing contradictory orders, which Farfour must perform simultaneously. This forces Farfour to ask him: "Master… you, master… won't you tell me, master… but why are you my master?"[^6] Thus our author

confirms his basic idea – the idea of the master and the slave – through the dramatic situation following Farfour's question. The master cannot answer Farfour's question, so he is forced to call the author to answer his question. The author comes for the second time and orders Farfour to act according to all the master's commands. We note here that this situation is the very same previous dramatic situation. Our author, Yousef Idris, discusses the same idea in the same way. If we delete one of the two dramatic situations, it would not harm the construction of the play at all. The master orders Farfour to select a wife for him from among the rows of spectators. Farfour addresses the audience, saying:

"O attendees… O gentlemen… O ladies, misses, and spinsters… a groom from a family, occupying an important post, inclined to calm, and loving sleep, seeks a wife…"[^7]

Then Farfour proceeds to address one of the female spectators present in one of the theatre boxes – which is also a written role. This indicates to us that our author Yousef Idris intentionally chose a proscenium theatre – which is the traditional European theatrical construction model – since he mentioned the word (loge) as one of the spectator places in the play. This means Yousef Idris chose a European theatrical construction and did not choose a different model.

The (lady) agrees to marry the master after negotiation between her and Farfour. The lady descends from her box and stands with the master and Farfour in the acting area. During the agreement of the master and the lady to marry, (the Role Owner) – whom (the Author) assigned to play the role of the master's wife – enters. Our author here provides a stage direction saying: "Farfour goes to the imaginary door and holds an imaginary doorknob"[^8].

We notice from this direction that our author has intentionally used a suggestive technique, implying to the spectator that they are witnessing a theatrical game, and not a reality or tangible truth, as the acting area is devoid of any decor that suggests the nature of the place or time[^9]. Also, the use of an imaginary door is a form of suggesting the situation rather than embodying it. This itself reminds us of the Rebab Poet's bow, which the Rebab Poet – through brandishing it and through his words – turns into a sword, spear, or otherwise, based on an implicit agreement between the two parties of the game – the player and the

spectator – that there is a recreation of a situation through narration, or in the case of our play here, representing theatrical roles written in advance, not embodying a truth for the spectator[^10]. Here we see that the concept of theatrical illusion –

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which requires the spectator to believe what they see on stage – does not exist in the play of our author Yousef Idris. This also leads us to say that our author absorbed some of the secrets of the technique of ancient Arab art in creating a special atmosphere for the nature of theatrical spectacle. And just as we deduced that through our author's stage direction, we can also deduce – through the same aforementioned stage direction – the required acting method for this play: the actor's performance here is not a performance stemming from an embodiment or immersion acting method, but rather a performance carrying a spontaneous character more than a preparatory, immersion character. There is the actor – who is Farfour – entering an artificial and calculated improvisational space at the beginning with written theatrical roles for actors playing the roles of spectators. This may encourage some of the genuine spectators to engage in improvisations with the actors playing the roles of Farfour and the Master, thereby stripping the theatrical process of being a truth, drawing it into the space of play and imitation, not acting in its traditional Western sense – pre-Brechtian – which concerns one of the methods of immersion or embodiment acting.

We return to completing the analytical reading of the play's events, finding that (the Role Owner) engages in a dispute with (the Lady) over which of them is more entitled to marry the master. The master intervenes, declaring that he will marry whichever of them can prove to him that she is better.

A woman, whom (the Author) assigned to play the role of Farfour's wife, also enters the acting area. In a single moment, she reveals her face to him, and he is shocked by her ugliness and runs from her, hiding behind the master. Here, our author Yousef Idris exploits this situation to make it a source of laughter in the play, which is the source of (the situation). We find Farfour forced to marry a woman in the form of a man, as she uses the principle of

violence and muscular strength, while Farfour flees from her, declaring that he is not a man and that she is more of a man than he is.

The two women try to seduce the master, so (the Role Owner) dances a folk dance,

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while the other tries a strange double dance. During the master's attempt to explore the charms of each, Farfour is in the hands of his bride, unconscious from the effect of the Upper Egyptian stick dance (tahtib). The master is forced to marry both women (the Lady and the Role Owner) because he admires them both!

In the following dramatic situation, Yousef Idris transports us with a sudden leap in time, where we find that the master's two wives have given birth to a boy and a girl, or another generation of masters. We also find that Farfour's wife has given birth to a child the size of a man. The technique of temporal condensation and event leaps separated by long time periods is repeated more than once during our analytical reading of this play. This reminds us of the same temporal leaps and the nature of this condensation that characterizes folk spectacle performances of Aragoz, Shadow Play, Rebab Poet, etc.[^11]. The master and Farfour have fallen into the grip of a financial crisis, resulting from unemployment both suffer, and because of the increasing demands urged by the master's two wives and Farfour's wife. This prompts the master to order Farfour to find a dead person to bury and take the burial fee. The master is forced to threaten Farfour that he will bury him alive if he does not find a dead person, and orders him to kill someone if he fails to find a dead person. Farfour addresses the audience and asks them who wants to die. One of the spectators – a pre-written role – stands up, declaring that he is the wanted man… He ascends to the acting area. After the master ensures that he will get the burial fee from the spectator's heirs, he orders Farfour to kill him. Farfour tries to kill the spectator but retreats each time. Finally, the master threatens to kill him if he does not kill the spectator. Farfour fails for the last time, so the master is forced to kill the spectator himself.

In the following dramatic situation, we find that the master has buried the spectator and received his burial fee. Here, the same technique we previously noted is repeated: the

technique of rapid temporal leaps. We find that the master has spent the money he had and needs more money, so he orders Farfour to bring him another man.

Here, Farfour declares that he will not allow himself to be a Farfour, stressing that he will not fear (the Author), and leaves the acting area, ending the first part of the play.

The second part begins with the master asking all the spectators about Farfour. Farfour soon appears in the hall, entering with a cart carrying some antiques and relics. Here we learn that they separated for thousands of years, during which the master fathered a very large offspring of masters, all of whom carried out killings and burials across long times and many places. Here, Yousef Idris points to the names of the masters of all human history: Alexander, Mussolini, Hitler, Thutmose… etc., as they are the offspring of the master. He also lists the names of the various slaves who attempted to rebel against their social status, such as: Antarah ibn Shaddad, Kafur al-Ikhshidi!, Abu Zayd al-Hilali! … etc.

We note here that the names of Farfour's sons are Arab names, and that most of the names of the master's sons are foreign names. We realize thereby the author's inclination to stress that Westerners are the masters of this world, and that Arabs are its farafeer. Farfour rebels and invites the master to reverse their social positions. After they fail to be from one class, the working class, Farfour fails to prove his claim. Some spectators – all having written roles – stand up. The first presents the idea that Farfour and the master both be masters, and leave the task of work to the state, but this idea proves a failure. The second intervenes and presents an idea whose content is that the law of life necessitates the existence of masters and farafeer, but Farfour rejects this claim. A female spectator named (Freedom) stands on the acting platform – by the will of the author Yousef Idris – as if a statue, to declare that the principle of freedom must be present, but her call is rejected by both the master and Farfour upon learning that merely looking at the other person might cost one's life.

During an extensive conference, the spectators – whose roles are written – present numerous ideas such as existentialism and absurdism. We note here that Yousef Idris presents to us – through the spectator roles – a series of ideas that collectively form, according to their

order in the play, the series of general human thought. They are, in order: the idea of the mastery of some and the slavery of others that persisted until the spread of Marxist thought, then Marxist thought, then existentialist thought, then absurdist thought, then American freedom. These are ideas that influenced the movements of social thought and the shaping of human societies, ancient and modern.

Farfour is forced to call for (the Author). A group of men respond to him and ask him to come and take him. Farfour exits and returns carrying a large rolled paper, from which he pulls out roll after roll, until he ends up with an electron or an atom. Farfour believes in this atom, but the master doubts this opinion. The two declare their failure as actors to immerse themselves in their roles in the story written by (the Author). (The Curtain Worker) intervenes and suggests a solution to this crisis, represented in suicide, so that he can finish the day's work. The two decide to implement this idea by committing suicide by hanging with the rope of the stage curtain – and this is another confirmation from our author that we are dealing with an Italian proscenium theatre. After several attempts, the two die. Each wakes up to find himself in another world, having transformed into two atoms. Therefore, they had to submit to the laws of this universe, and due to the master's heavy weight and Farfour's light weight, Farfour keeps revolving around the master until the play ends with the curtain falling. Thus ends the second part of the play.

It is initially noticeable that the order of the two parts is subject to an event-based factor, as Yousef Idris wrote them, not as he said that either part could replace the other.

Through this analytical survey of the play's events, it becomes clear to us that its basic idea addresses the issue of the master and the farfour. The play speaks its final sentence saying: (The master shall remain master and the farfour a farfour forever). Yousef Idris treated this idea through three main characters: (1) the Author character, (2) the Farfour character, (3) the Master character. We notice through our reading of the play's event vocabulary that the character of (the Author) contains the following features:

1. Appears in a laughter-provoking form, due to his clothes.

2. Often carries our author Yousef Idris's call on his tongue, especially at his first appearance.
3. Generally, Yousef Idris uses him to signify the creator god of characters and social systems that he pre-imposes. These characters must act according to his system without distortion.
4. An allusion that the god of this universe is ultimately just the first moving force of matter, which is the atom. This indicates that our author wrote this play during a phase of intellectual adolescence, characterized by rebellion against the old and a burning aspiration toward everything new and clinging to it.

Also, the Master character possesses the following features:

1. A somewhat fat man, of heavy weight.
2. His dramatic desire is defined by his feeling of mastery.
3. Lives for thousands of years: he is Abel's killer, and the same one who speaks about the atom and its components. This indicates to us that he is a character by which Yousef Idris intended to carry the meaning of mastery and dominance.
4. Linked to a realistic social structure: he is married to two contemporary women and fathers children with them. Then our author Yousef Idris soon extracts him from this

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context, to the vast horizon of fantasy, as he fathers all the masters of history and lives for thousands of years.

This is about the features of the Master character. As for the Farfour character, we can present its general features in the following points:

1. A character that was created to find itself subjugated to serving the master.
2. Its character contains some realistic aspects such as: social pressures imposed upon it a lifestyle, which is the pattern of the rebellious slave who does not agree with their pre-assigned social classification. Therefore, its dramatic desire is defined by breaking out of this social classification to another classification that it chooses itself.

3. Its character contains some aspects of fantasy, such as: it also lives for thousands of years, and then transforms into an atom at the end.

We note from the above that the play's characters belong to the world of fantasy, and that the play's structure is a play within a play, a world similar to Pirandello's theatrical world.

It is worth mentioning that Yousef Idris formulated his entire play in the language of the inhabitants of the Egyptian capital. It contained some French expressions uttered by the character of (the female spectator). Also, the place of the play's event is a traditional proscenium theatre, with a stage separated from the spectator's hall by a psychological distance. Alongside the author's use – through his directions – of the hall as an acting space as well, to stimulate the genuine spectator to participate positively in the game presented to him, by him, and with him. The dramatic event occupied an unspecified time, although the two parts are separated by thousands of years. There is also a mixing of the worlds of reality and imagination, like Pirandello's dramas as well.

Preliminary Results:

We noted at the beginning of this chapter that Yousef Idris had a complete vision, calling for an (authentic Egyptian – Arab play). So, was he able to apply this vision through his play (Al-Farafeer)?

If we return to the introduction of this chapter, in the part summarizing Yousef Idris's theorizing for the desired Egyptian – Arab play, we will find that what concerns us are paragraphs (Second) and (Fifth). The second paragraph deals with the necessity of the audience's active participation in the theatrical process, and that they must engage in the creative process side by side with the actor. Was this theoretical part achieved in the play? We noticed – during our analytical reading of the play – that Yousef Idris presented a set of dialogues between the actors playing the roles of the Master and Farfour, and the participating spectator audience. These dialogues relied on writing dramatic roles for them, such as the roles of: 1 – the Lady, 2 – Spectator, 3 – Spectator 2, 4 – Spectator 3, 5 – Female Spectator.

These are pre-determined theatrical roles. Therefore, these dialogues are between actors and actors, not between actors and real spectators. We spoke about this matter previously and said that the artificial spectator – an actor playing a spectator role – stimulates the real spectator to intervene in the belly of the theatrical game, so that they become a positive element in the theatrical performance, and their role is not limited to mere passive watching belonging to the world of European theatre in particular and Western theatre in general. In paragraph (Fifth), Yousef Idris clarifies who the farfour is from his point of view, describing him as:

1 – A laughter-provoking character. 2 – His role is written so that the rest of the dramatic roles serve him. 3 – A true example of the clever, intelligent, sarcastic Egyptian novelistic hero, containing within himself the personalities of (Ali al-Zeibaq) and (Hamza al-Bahlawan).

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4 – A human being sarcastic by nature and disposition. 5 – Expressive of farfourism, which in turn is a clear, distinct sign of the signs of theatricalization in the form of a Samer. 6 – Uses his tongue to express his sarcasm about what is around him and those around him.

We notice through these six points and through the analytical reading of the play that point (1) is absent. The sources of laughter in the play are defined by situation, wording, and movement, because Farfour is not a character that provokes laughter in itself. Here we must distinguish between the general traits of a character that provokes laughter in itself, such as Molière's (1622-1673) miser, his learned lady, or his amorous old man, and between its verbal statements that provoke our laughter. Farfour carries no feature of provoking laughter. What laughter trigger arises from a character created with the cloak of slavery, struggling to repel this cloak, in recognition of its humanity? What laughter trigger arises from a character condemned to remain in the cloak of slavery even after death and resurrection? This confirms that Yousef Idris did not apply the first trait he described for his Farfour in his dramatic application. He described the trait of comedy in the character in his theorizing, and when he applied that in his play, he created a purely tragic character. As for point (2) he raised in his theorizing, it dictates that Farfour is the main character and that all dramatic roles were created to serve him. This we did not find in his dramatic application. The play (Al-Farafeer) launches its basic idea from the nature of the relationship between the positions of the Master

and Farfour together. It is that relationship that carries between two opposing poles the play's intellectual message, in addition to the Author character, which came to confirm that this relationship is compulsory, unavoidable for the Master or Farfour in bringing it about. Point (3) makes us imagine (Farfour) as the spectator's conscience and mind, just like the character of (Aragoz). This is what we will discuss when making the comparison between Yousef Idris's Farafeer and the general features of our ancient Arab theatre.

Moving to point (4), we find that Yousef Idris confuses between (the farfour – the character) and (the farfour – the actor). The farfour – the character was merged with the farfour – the actor in his play Al-Farafeer. The farfour came in a dramatic role as an actor playing the role of Farfour – the character. But within the framework of the written drama, it is a character playing the role of a character, not an actor playing the role of a character. Yousef Idris demands that the actor playing the role of Farfour be sarcastic by nature and disposition… Why this trait? This is what our author did not specify: neither in his theorizing nor in his drama. Yousef Idris pulled sarcasm – the trait – from the character of Farfour to the person of the actor. He even imposes upon him a specific pattern of living, behavior, and speech. This is something no theatrical approach has ever done throughout theatre history and across its geography, nor was it stipulated by specialized studies in the psychology of this art. As for point (5), we will postpone it to the next axis in detail. The final point (6) remains, and it was confirmed in the play alongside his whip. This ultimately indicates that what Yousef Idris said in his theorizing was partially implemented and partially deviated from in his drama.

Axis Two

Between the Traditions of Arab Theatre and Yousef Idris's Achievement

We conclude from our study in the first part of this book that Arab folk spectacle arts carry the fundamentals of theatrical art. There are also general features linking the arts of: "Shadow Play," "Aragoz," and "the Rebab Poet," which we previously summarized in the following points:

1 – The element of the performer (Actor) in all of them carries significant tasks in its acting performance: they must have the ability for vocal coloring, and must have a good voice, because they are often tasked with singing in some of their dramatic situations[^12]. They must also have a flexible body for simple physical expression in the case of the Rebab Poet's theatre. The performer in Arab theatre often plays more than one character in a single performance. Therefore, they need more focus and presence before their spectators.

2 – The nature of the spectacle's place imposed a special relationship between the two parties of the game: the artist – the spectator. The axes of this relationship are: (a) Most Arab theatre performances begin with direct address to the spectator and often end in the same manner.

(b) The spectator has the right to stop or change the course of the theatrical performance, or to choose what they want, as in the case of the Rebab Poet. © The performer displays their ability to imitate the human models they present, and does not ask the spectator to believe these actions. Rather, these models are often presented in a suggestive, not illusory, manner. 3 – The subjects of Arab theatre are inspired by the reality of the spectator and address issues that concern them. 4 – Arab theatre performances carry a sarcastic character. Hence, jokes and various laughter triggers spread in them, meaning they can be classified as belonging to the

comedy type in most cases, with the exception of some subjects of the Rebab Poet and Aragoz[^13]. If we compare the aforementioned points, specific to the nature of the play Al-Farafeer, in their same previous order, we find the following:

1 – Yousef Idris confused between the farfour as a character and as an actor. Therefore, we find him pulling all the actor's elements – as we mentioned before – into the world of the dramatic character's determinants. Hence, we can say that the performer model we spoke about here carries all the elements of the Farfour character in the play Al-Farafeer. 2 – The spectacle's place in the play is the traditional Italian proscenium theatre, whereas what Yousef Idris said – in his theorizing – concerns the place of the (Samer), and he did not apply it in his drama. Thus, he agrees with the data of the place of Arab folk spectacle performances, and contradicts the spatial data presented in his play (Al-Farafeer). Consequently, the following techniques become clear: (a) The play (Al-Farafeer) begins with direct address to the spectator, and it may engage them in genuine participation throughout the play.

(b) Yousef Idris wrote dramatic roles for spectators to be performed by actors, but as a result of the nature of the presented subject, the spectator may fear to plunge into participation in the theatrical game as a creative spectator does. © Yousef Idris mixed reality and illusion in his play (Al-Farafeer) in the Pirandellian manner[^14]. In many dramatic situations of the play, we become confused between the truth of Farfour as an actor who came to perform a role and the character of Farfour played by the actor Farfour. 3 – The play was inspired by a general human idea and subject, and did not address a real issue suffered by the Egyptian spectator. Especially since the time of the play's first publication – in the mid-sixties – was full of major, urgent national causes. 4 – The play carries an overall tragic character, even if it contained some comic dramatic moments.

After this presentation, we can say: that Yousef Idris differed from his people's heritage in points: (1), (2: b – c), (3), and agreed with it in points: (2: a), (4). The question that now presents itself is: Does the Farfour have an existence in our Egyptian or Arab theatre, ancient or modern?

We searched for the word (Farfour) in popular circles and did not find evidence of a relationship between this name and ancient Arab theatrical art. Its meaning in popular circles does not exceed the meanings of: (effeminate man, son of the wealthy, emaciated boy). As for the meaning of the word in the Arabic language, with damma on both fa's and sukun on the ra, it is "the boy. And – the small sparrow"[^15]. Not a single study of theatrical criticism has indicated a connection of the word (Farfour) with the Arab performer in their different eras. Perhaps Yousef Idris intended by this name the concept of the Arab performer, after he attributed to it many of the characteristics of the (Aragoz) character, despite his attempt to differentiate between the two characters.

General Results:

It becomes clear through this study that Yousef Idris presented a theorization of what the (authentic Egyptian – Arab play) could be. However, he deviated from this theorization into the circle of the theatre of Luigi Pirandello in the West. This was in his reliance on the technique of mixing illusion with reality. We see a Farfour acting, then we see him suffering as the character of Farfour written by (the Author). Or that (the Author) created the character of Farfour to suffer, just as Pirandello did in his play (Six Characters in Search of an Author – 1921), with the difference in the dramatic expression styles between the two plays.

Yousef Idris's inspiration from the technical framework of the Pirandellian play led him to the following: First: His theorizing for the Egyptian – Arab play differed from his dramatic application in his play (Al-Farafeer). Second: The play (Al-Farafeer) aligns with Western theatre generally in: 1 – The Pirandellian mixing between reality and illusion. 2 – The spectacle's place: the Western proscenium theatre. 3 – The play carries a general human idea, which is the idea of: (the master – the enslaved), just like most Western dramatic texts or Arab texts with a Western technical framework.

Also, the play does not technically agree with the general features of ancient Arab theatre, except in the technique of directly addressing the spectator at the beginning of the play. Yousef Idris's realization of his failure to reach his goal of achieving an authentic Egyptian –

Arab play can be translated in that he did not repeat this attempt a second time in his subsequent works.

Chapter Two

Tawfiq al-Hakim … and His Theatrical Mould

A Critical Reading

Al-Hakim Denounces Yousef Idris's Achievement:

Although Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987) wrote his important work "Our Theatrical Mould – 1967" more than three years after the publication of the three articles Yousef Idris titled "Towards an Egyptian Theatre" in the pages of the Cairene magazine "Al-Katib," he – Tawfiq al-Hakim – did not make a single reference to this achievement, which received a great media explosion in its resonance and effect on the theatre movement in Egypt at that time. Perhaps Tawfiq al-Hakim intended, by this blackout, to present another theory of pure Arab theatrical creativity, without delving into the discussion of another theory with which he differed in both its broad and detailed outlines.

Tawfiq al-Hakim imitated Yousef Idris's precedent in setting a theoretical framework – just as Yousef Idris did in his three articles – then followed it with a dramatic application – just as Yousef Idris did when writing his play "Al-Farafeer." All this without the slightest mention or reference. It is a deliberate denunciation by Tawfiq al-Hakim of Yousef Idris's achievement, a denunciation that conceals as much intelligence and shrewdness as it displays care and mastery of the principles of French social etiquette in its purest form.

Al-Hakim Denounces the Forms of Arab Folk Theatre:

In the preface of his book "Our Theatrical Mould," Tawfiq al-Hakim says: "There is no one among those engaged in theatre, interested in it, or lovers of it, who has not asked about the absence of this art from our Arab civilization… The search has been extensive into the

reasons that made this art known in the lands of the Greeks, India, and even China and Japan, but not known in our lands before the last century… Then there was much talk about the matter

The Arabic Play - 113

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of cultivating this art in our lands in the last century through translation and adaptation, and what it has resulted in and continues to result in revealing our personality and clarifying our character… Then efforts continued in a bid for revelation and clarification of the personality and character, attempting to link, even with a thin thread, this new art to us with some ancient artistic manifestations in our folk communities"[^16].

Despite the fact that the forms of Aragoz and Shadow Play theatre are recognized as theatre in the East and West of the Earth, Tawfiq al-Hakim presents – here – his denunciation of them implicitly, declaring that Arabs did not know the art of theatre until the last century. Specifically, he means the year 1847, when the Syrian artist Marun al-Naqqash (1817-1855) performed his first play in Saida, the first Arab play presented in the manner of Western theatre.

Thus, it can be said that Tawfiq al-Hakim denounced a historical truth inscribed by the players of this art on the lines of the Arab spectator’s conscience for long years. A truth that still roams the streets, alleys, and lanes of the Egyptian country to this very day. He replaces this truth with another claim, whose content is: The Western form of theatre is the only theatrical form that Arabs have known. Based on this logically correct premise – from his point of view – al-Hakim lays down another edifice of premises to reach the “awaited mould” as an inevitable result.

Far from the acting art:

Tawfiq al-Hakim says: "… In 1930, while I was then working in the countryside, I wrote the play (The Flutist) inspired by the rural Samer. I made its hero one of the flute players of the Samer, working in it at night and working as a nurse during the day in a rural health inspector’s clinic. He transformed this doctor’s clinic into a real Samer… Then in the year

1956, (The Deal) appeared, which is an attempt to introduce rural folk arts of dance, stick dance, and singing into the framework of the play, and to have it all take place in the open air, the threshing floor, or in front of a stone bench… Until the year 1962, when there was another attempt to link some of our folk features with the latest manifestations of contemporary art in (O Ascender of the Tree). My question in it was: Can we catch up with the latest trends of world art through our own art and folk heritage?"[^17]

We notice here that Tawfiq al-Hakim speaks of some folk elements, from non-acting arts, which he incorporated into some of his plays, such as The Flutist, The Deal, and O Ascender of the Tree. Perhaps the expression "folk" that Tawfiq al-Hakim mentions here, and from its usage in various contexts, becomes clear that he uses it as a term synonymous with "rural" or "socially lowly." The man, the flutist who loves to play the reed flute, is a folk man! – as in the play "The Flutist." And introducing folk dance, stick dance, and singing, and making the play's events take place in the open air, the threshing floor, or in front of a stone bench, is a folk formulation of art! – as in the play The Deal. Perhaps it escaped Tawfiq al-Hakim's mind that the term "folk" is an old term compared to the time of writing the book "Our Theatrical Mould," and that this term has a set of agreed-upon fundamental concepts that have not been subject to confusion[^18].

Tawfiq al-Hakim believes that bringing in a man who whistles on a reed flute will produce a folk dramatic work, despite its presence in a purely Western dramatic context. He also believes that by bringing – through a theatrical direction – a text indicating the presence of a folk stick dance and mawwals, he will make the dramatic work folk. This contradicts the concept of what is "folk" on one hand, and contradicts "folk creativity" as an agreed-upon concept on the other hand.

The Samer is not an Arab Folk Theatre:

Tawfiq al-Hakim adds to the previous premises another premise, concerning his opinion on the Samer, which some believed to have an Egyptian – Arab origin, saying:

“Even the Samer itself and the theatrical scenes within it were only known after the French campaign entered Egypt and what it brought of acting in the manner described by the historian al-Jabarti… (…) Thus also the theatrical art among us proceeded… It began with translation and adaptation from European theatre… And the process of translation from Europe proceeded starting from the Samer stage to the stage of translation and adaptation, until it reached the stage of original authorship”[^19].

It is clear from this paragraph that Tawfiq al-Hakim traces the only theatrical form that Yousef Idris adopted – to revive an authentic folk theatrical form – to a European, not an Arab, origin. While Yousef Idris was enthusiastic about the Samer form cultivated from our reality, Tawfiq al-Hakim tries to trace it back to a French origin, linking this to the arrival of the French campaign in Egypt in 1798. Here it is worth noting that Tawfiq al-Hakim confuses the folk Samer with its distinct compositions with the Western arena (circular) theatre. Both theatres consist of a circle surrounded by spectators on all sides, but each has its own technique of performance. If the Western arena theatre was brought by the French campaign to Egypt to become a Samer, wouldn’t it have been more fitting for it to exist in the heart of the Egyptian capital, or Alexandria, or the major cities of the Egyptian country, where the real presence of French culture in particular and European culture in general existed alongside the barracks of its original owners residing in Egypt at the moment of occupation or after it? Or would the Egyptian countryside, remote from all that is Western, be influenced by the arts of the Westerners under a historical era in which the countryside isolated itself from urban dwellers?! Tawfiq al-Hakim here deduces an opinion far from historical truth on one hand, and far from the limits of logic in its simplest form on the other.

As if Nothing Had Happened:

Tawfiq al-Hakim poses a question, saying: “Can we depart from the scope of the universal mould, and create for ourselves a mould and form extracted from within our land and the core of our heritage?”[^20]

He posed this question after Yousef Idris had completed his theoretical and dramatic experiment by more than three years. Tawfiq al-Hakim here asks his question as if nothing had happened before. If this question had been posed by its owner four years before its date, al-Hakim would have been right in that. But since he asks it after the "Al-Farafeer" experiment, starting from ground zero again, this is something that cannot be accepted.

Benefiting from others' mistakes saves us a lot of time and effort and shortens the path to reaching the desired goal. But not respecting others' efforts, and not caring about them and their mistakes, this will mostly lead to arriving at new mistakes through innovative mediums, and it will not ultimately lead to the goal.

Yes, Yousef Idris made some mistakes in his call (Towards an Egyptian Theatre), but he did not make a grave mistake. Rather, he is credited with the merit of precedence and pioneering in that call. It would have been possible for Tawfiq al-Hakim to benefit from studying this thesis that emerged from Yousef Idris's quiver, to refute its parts and critique it, to extract what was sound from it and build upon it, after getting rid of the flaws that corrupted the previous call. However, Tawfiq al-Hakim chose not to pay attention to Yousef Idris's experiment, and to build an independent pyramid carrying his name alone, without looking at a previous pyramid that had some flaws. Will Tawfiq al-Hakim be able to create the desired Arab play without paying attention to previous experiments?

A Return to Before the Arab Acting Art:

Since Tawfiq al-Hakim believed that the art of (the Samer) is of Western origin, he therefore starts from the stage of litterateurs' literature and the assemblies of ancient Arab literature, saying:

"Whatever the case may be, we should not desist from the attempt… I have thought about this and realized that to search and excavate inside our land and our heritage, we must return back to before the Samer stage… Only there will we be far from all external influences… So what is the stage preceding the Samer stage? It is, without doubt, the stage in which we were very far from the idea of acting or performing… That was the era when we knew nothing but

storytellers, panegyrists, and imitators… Primitive arts, no doubt, but people at that time nevertheless found in them the most fertile pleasure (…) (…) Here, then, is the source from which we can bring out something… If we add to this folk source another source from our literary heritage in the 'Songs' by al-Isfahani and in what was narrated by al-Jahiz, al-Hariri, Badi' al-Zaman, and others of characters, situations, and dialogue (…) we can come up with an opinion on the matter of the theatrical shape or mould we are trying to uncover"[^21].

Tawfiq al-Hakim here speaks of an effective "local recipe," as he calls for reviving the bones of the imitators while they are decayed, and colliding them with characters and subjects from ancient Arab literature that (used to) entertain the (ancient) Arab audience. Tawfiq al-Hakim forgot – or pretended to forget – that traveling in history, like traveling in geography, produces a feeling of alienation. If we were to live an authentic artistic moment from the moments of the ancient Arabs, we would feel then that we are of another stock. Tawfiq al-Hakim forgot – or pretended to forget – an important principle of the principles that govern this solid – living universe, and govern human nature in its various orientations, which is the principle of evolution… which means death and life. Cultural cells that do not carry the capabilities for their survival die, so that new cultural cells may live,

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capable of facing the universe of this era. Vocabulary that loses its signifiers' ability to live dies and becomes, like everything old, merely a fossil preserved between the covers of a book.

Why didn't the Europeans rise to revive the Latin language so that it could be circulated anew? Is it negligence on their part? If this is the matter with language, does this not also apply to different means of expression?

A New Theory … Towards an Arab Theatre:

Tawfiq al-Hakim's theory of the "Arab theatrical mould" is based on hybridizing intermediary folk elements with elements from world drama of high technical level. The folk intermediaries here are: the storyteller, the imitator, and the panegyrist. Al-Hakim clarifies that this type of play does not need a theatre stage, decor, lighting, makeup, or costumes. This

theatre relies fundamentally on the artistic ability enjoyed by the narrator, the imitator, and the panegyrist… They appear with their ordinary persons and their ordinary clothes as well, to produce the deepest effect in the spectator's soul. It is the folk theatre in its simplest forms, and its most refined at the same time. Tawfiq al-Hakim believes that this simple theatrical form does not stop at folk limits only, but also extends to make theatre distinct from other performing arts, especially cinema. The extraordinary ability that cinematic art enjoys, making it capable of probing the depths of reality's details, has withdrawn from theatre its ability to copy this reality. Theatre thus appeared helpless before this ability that cinematic art obtained. Therefore, Tawfiq al-Hakim proposes that theatrical art turn to its source – its essence, where the simplicity of technical means and honesty of performance exist simultaneously.

Al-Hakim clarifies that the immersion acting method, or the psychological realism of acting, is a backward method. Modern theatre theories

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no longer work with it. He attributes this to the theatre audience itself – meaning the Western audience – having surpassed this stage through its intellectual maturity and artistic awareness, and that it now refuses to be acted upon. The spectator of today's theatre does not want to be absorbed in the illusion of the game, but rather wants to uncover the secrets of its craftsmanship, and also wants to participate in this game with positive participation, the participation of the maker, not the consumer. Tawfiq al-Hakim says:

"Hence our mould, although its source is primitive, connects with the latest theories of contemporary theatre… Among these theories is one that says today's audience has grown out of its childhood and reached a maturity and awareness that refuses the idea of acting upon it, i.e., the idea of theatrical illusion… It is not satisfied with us presenting the game to it, but it also wants us to present how the game was made… It wants to see the garment and the lining of the garment… It wants to participate in creation, even if by following the secrets of creation… It is not satisfied with the magician seeing his tricks, but it wants the magician to show it how the trick was made… Therefore, some theatres there resorted to assembling the sets in the presence of the audience after opening the curtain and during the performance, not before it"[^22].

It is clear from this statement by al-Hakim that he cares only – among the vocabulary of modern theatre theories – about some purely formal details. Western theatre did not turn to all these formal innovations except stemming from a specific understanding of the essence of theatre and its function. Epic theatre, for example – attributed to the German theatre man "Bertolt Brecht" (1898-1956) – innovated such techniques for purposes connected to an integrated theatrical theory, and not merely for empty "fads" or "fashions" devoid of content[^23]. Tawfiq al-Hakim clarifies that the nature of the imitator in the core of our heritage aligns – as he believes – with the actor in contemporary theatre theories. The imitator and narrator, as Tawfiq al-Hakim says:

"present before us every game in the open… I say (game), because they indeed used to call this presentation in the past (a game), confirming to people that this art does not intend to deceive anyone… (…) The narrator in our mould can be assigned various other tasks… He can be the director of the performance who monitors and directs it openly before us, and he can also be the director who helps the imitator before the performance to understand the characters and their visible and hidden features and study the details of every movement, tone, and gesture that distinguishes one from another… The narrator's work can also be expanded, so we make him bear the task of interpreting some difficult meanings, situations, and ideas, especially in popular environments that may need that… He can also help the imitator during the performance in everything that requires the presence of another person… The possibilities for developing this mould are endless… On the condition that we preserve the basis of its philosophy, which differs from the philosophy of the European mould: that it is based on the idea of imitation and not on the idea of acting"[^24].

The goal of this theatrical mould:

Tawfiq al-Hakim had clarified some important aspects of the technique of the desired Arab theatrical mould. He spoke about the nature of the main characters and their specific dramatic and theatrical roles. He then addressed the sources of the subjects of this mould, such as characters and subjects derived from the Arab literary spring like al-Isfahani's Songs, and some writings of al-Jahiz… etc. Then he determined – afterwards – that the acting technique is a technique of imitation and not the technique of immersion or psychological

realism, and the revealing of all secrets of the acting game before the spectator. Then the attempt to draw the spectator into the circle of positive participation through their creativity, not merely peeping at what happens on the stage, mediated by the imaginary fourth wall that characterized traditional European theatre.

Tawfiq al-Hakim did not stop at talking about the nature of the technique of this desired Arab theatrical mould but also defined the goal of creating this mould, saying:

"Our mould at least has a noble practical goal: simplifying the means that carries, at the lowest cost, the finest works of art and the human mind to the entire people in its neighborhoods and villages… For the sake of this goal, perhaps we can also claim that this shape or mould does not only solve the problem of (folk theatre) in our country alone, but for every other people in the world as well… in the smallest factory and the smallest village…"[^25]

Thus, the goal of creating this new mould is to simplify the technical means to transmit the masterpieces of world artistic works to the largest possible number of the audience. Tawfiq al-Hakim falls – here – into a clear logical fallacy. This desired goal is the result of the set of premises we have already refuted on one hand, and on the other hand, changing the technical means will necessarily be followed by the distortion of the original theatrical work that was created in a specific mould and with special technical means that distinguish it. These are the very – technical means – that made this artistic work an artistically distinguished work. If we extract only a dialogue piece, or the subject of the play as a whole, and place it in an artistic mould with its (simple) technical means, the world artistic work loses the secrets of its universality, and the play's subject becomes an ordinary subject of no value.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) did not author a single play in terms of its subject. The universality of Shakespeare's plays does not lie in the value of the subjects, but lies in the value of the distinctive dramatic treatment, or the special technical style. If we strip a play like Hamlet of its distinctive Shakespearean artistic elements, nothing will remain then but a flimsy subject of no value.

Al-Hakim Shuns Heritage:

After Tawfiq al-Hakim completed his theoretical introduction, concluding it with a piece of advice saying: we must not abandon the universal theatrical mould and must continue walking on its path – he places a set of his artistic adaptations for parts of some world texts. Tawfiq al-Hakim called for inspiring characters and subjects from the core of our well-known literary heritage. Then he moves – at the application stage – to distinguished world dramas to adapt them to suit the simple technical means (the storyteller – the imitator) that he believes the (very ancient) Arab audience became accustomed to in some of their folk artistic patterns. His selections were from:

1. Agamemnon: Aeschylus.
2. Hamlet: William Shakespeare.
3. Don Juan: Molière.
4. Peer Gynt: Ibsen.
5. The Cherry Orchard: Anton Chekhov.
6. Six Characters in Search of an Author: Pirandello.
7. The Angel Descended in Babylon: Friedrich Dürrenmatt.

An Analytical Study of the Hamlet Model:

Tawfiq al-Hakim begins his dramatic adaptation of a few pages of the play “Hamlet” according to the dramatic theory he set as an introduction to his book “Our Theatrical Mould” – with an opening that reminds us of the opening of familiar folk epics, on the tongue of the narrator who says:

"The Narrator: I am the storyteller (he mentions his real name). I present to you a game by the author Shakespeare called (Hamlet) … It was, or it never was, O Saad, O Ikram, in the land of Denmark, a good king with a beautiful wife and a dutiful son named Hamlet. He also had a

wicked brother who coveted his throne and his wife… This brother lay in wait for him one day while he slept safe in the palace garden and slipped poison into his ear and killed him… Then he married his widow and ascended his throne… Naturally, Prince Hamlet grieved for his father's death and was shocked by his mother's swift marriage to his uncle… Until Hamlet learned one night that his father's ghost had appeared wandering, hovering around the palace. When he met him, he learned from him the secret of the crime… And from that night on, he lived disturbed, confused, between doubt and certainty, seeking confirmation to begin his revenge… How Shakespeare managed to craft from this simple tale his immortal masterpiece, this is what we will now see through the game of the imitators… Step forward, first imitator, and tell the esteemed audience whom you will imitate… And begin by introducing yourself to us"[^26].

We notice that this opening contains six elements: 1 – The narrator introduces himself. 2 – Defining the name of the presented game and its real author's name. 3 – Presenting a summary of what the spectator will see. 4 – Specifying the purpose of the game in: How did Shakespeare manage to craft this simple tale in a dramatic mould? 5 – Specifying who will imitate the characters of the game: the male imitator and the female imitator. 6 – Presenting the imitator to the audience, then a request to define the roles he will imitate.

After the (imitator) introduces himself to us, he clarifies that he will play many roles, defining the character's name and its position in the network of dramatic relationships. The characters are: Hamlet – the Ghost – the Uncle – Polonius – Horatio – Laertes – Bernardo – Francisco – Marcellus – courtiers, and others. The narrator presents the female imitator to the spectator audience and asks her to introduce her character to us. She introduces herself to us as the female imitator, mentioning her real name, then she clarifies the characters she will imitate, which are: Gertrude – Ophelia, and others.

The narrator announces the start of the game, clarifying the elements of time and place, saying:

"The Narrator: Very well… Now let's begin the game! … It begins at a paved position in front of the palace… And this palace is a residence and a fortress at the same time… We are

now at night… at midnight… Francisco is standing guard… And at that moment his colleague Bernardo approaches him… He of course cannot recognize him in the darkness of the night… Proceed now to work, O imitator… and imitate for us Bernardo as he approached Francisco, and the conversation that took place between them…"[^27]

Tawfiq al-Hakim here did not explicitly state the existence of some visible theatrical image that expresses this narrative description. He contented himself with words as a means to stir the spectator's imagination.

The imitator begins, during the first scene, to imitate several characters: (Bernardo – Horatio – Marcellus) alternately, before the spectator audience, in the manner known in Egyptian popular circles as (he sings and responds to himself). Through the dialogue taking place between them, we learn that the ghost of the previous king has appeared on two successive nights. Horatio does not believe this claim until the ghost appears a third time. Horatio then decides to inform his friend Prince Hamlet of this strange event.

The imitator does not direct his speech to the narrator; rather, the opposite is true. The narrator is the one who orders him to start the game or stop it to comment on some matters that require his intervention for the purpose of explanation.

Tawfiq al-Hakim draws inspiration from the most important part of the preparatory phase in the play Hamlet to help the spectator understand the play's events. He relates on the tongue of Horatio

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how the late King of Denmark won a battle against the King of Norway, Fortinbras, and seized his kingdom from him. But Fortinbras the son decided to prepare to reclaim his father's kingdom by force. Horatio explains that this is the reason why his kingdom is in a state of maximum military alert.

Tawfiq al-Hakim then chooses the scene of the uncle's coronation as King of Denmark, after introducing it through the narrator, who says:

“And now we are in a court ceremony in the palace… Here is the king entering, accompanied by the queen, Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Voltemand, and Cornelius… And lords and retinue… And now the king will speak… Go ahead, O imitator… Please!..”[^28]

After the new King of Denmark finishes his speech with some of his courtiers, he inquires from Hamlet about the reason for his grief and distress. After the narrator intervenes to point out that the queen, Hamlet’s mother, wants to be gentle with her son, he orders the female imitator, who quickly imitates the character of the mother, asking Hamlet to erase the traces of his grief over his father. But Hamlet confirms that a person often cannot curb the outburst of their sincere innate feelings. The narrator intervenes to alert the spectator that he wants to ease Hamlet’s burden, asking him to erase his grief over his father, otherwise he would travel to Wittenberg to study, and to stay in the palace before her eyes so that they may be reassured about his condition. After the mother repeats this request, Hamlet consents.

The narrator describes the exit of all those in the ceremony, except Hamlet, who remains alone, soliloquizing, expressing his extreme distress at this world: the mother marries the uncle, after her unique knight died. Hamlet expresses pain at the extent of this swift transformation in his mother’s affection. Within one month, her tears dried, and joy began to creep into her limbs on the day of her marriage to the uncle. During this, the narrator points to the entrance of Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo into Hamlet’s world. In this

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scene, the three inform Hamlet of what they saw of the ghost of the late King of Denmark. Then they leave Hamlet alone.

The narrator intervenes to describe Hamlet’s feelings after anxieties have stormed him. Al-Hakim then ends his adaptation of the play Hamlet with a final monologue for Hamlet, where he declares that something important has brought this ghost, and that he will investigate it in due time.

These are the features of the theatrical adaptation, or the Arab theatrical mould, as Tawfiq al-Hakim envisioned it. We can discern from it several matters:

First: Tawfiq al-Hakim burdened the imitator beyond his capacity! For it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – for a single actor to perform more than six characters before the spectator, for two reasons: the first: the ability to embody these characters – or imitate them as Tawfiq al-Hakim likes to call it – on the visual level will require a kinetic effort beyond any actor's capacity. The second: the spectator's ability to follow a single actor – and by spectator here I mean the Egyptian spectator – will lead them to a state of distraction and inability to concentrate. Consequently, the spectacle process turns into the spectator's attempt to gather their focus, more than their attempt to enjoy this manufactured artistic world.

Second: There are no vital dramatic functions that necessitate the presence of the narrator character. If we delete this role from the context of the selected part of the play, the play is not affected at all. It is, therefore, a superfluous technical element with no organic necessity for it.

Third: Relying on the presence of a single imitator means – implicitly – returning – or regressing – theatrically to the era of the first actor Thespis, to express dramatically the finest of Shakespeare's dramas. Theatre in this form will become auditory, like radio art, with no value to the theatrical image in it.

Fourth: The principle of spectator participation was not achieved in this adaptation. The spectator here is a consumer of the theatrical process, not a participant, as al-Hakim himself mentioned in his theoretical introduction.

Fifth: The ability of the Rebab Poet to influence his spectators through his distinguished performance techniques and his ability to communicate with the spectator deceived al-Hakim, making him believe that merely relying on description – through the narrator – will lead to the same result. But the truth is that the simple – honest poetic technique mediated by the folk artist is one of the elements influencing the Arab spectator. Also, the nature of the subjects derived from the reality of this spectator – whether historical, imaginary, or both – is an important factor in influencing them. The folk artist presents subjects that are at the core of his spectator's interests. The simplicity of the technical presentation is a trap into which professional writers like Tawfiq al-Hakim fall. The folk artistic work was not authored by a single person. Its nucleus was placed by one folk artist, and then dozens of talented narrators

came after him, refining this artistic work until it reached the highest degree of perfection. The precision of word choice, the selection of their structures, the control of the characters' emotions and reactions, and the suitability of the folk musical melody with all this, takes tens of years and dozens of artists, until it reaches the form known today. A simple form, but beautiful and honest, in which the folk artist benefited from the observations of his spectator audience night after night, adding and refining what he presents. It is a process more complex than the mind of a single creative individual can analyze and recreate.

Sixth: The nature of world theatre subjects are general human subjects that may suit the cultured spectator in any time and place. But the public – and especially the Arab public that deals spontaneously with what it sees of arts and what

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it hears of them – may not accept such subjects that arose in an environment other than theirs.

Seventh: Tawfiq al-Hakim speaks in his theoretical introduction about the simplicity of the technique of the theatrical work, and he formulates the play in a translated language characterized by difficulty for most Arab university students. So what if we took it as a medium for the illiterate Arab spectator? The text's translator selected stray vocabulary from the graveyards of yellowed books, then tried to revive it in a play script. The characterization of staging the text here necessitates a popular language understood by the various classes of the Arab spectator.

A Final Word:

We saw – in the first part of this book – how we have an authentic Arab theatre that preceded the European cultural invasion of our lands by hundreds of years. We also proved – with logical elements and material pillars – that it carries all the fundamentals of dramatic art in their generality, and that it has its own special fundamentals that reflect our aesthetic taste and carry our intellectual concerns.

Then we saw – in the second part – how Yousef Idris put his finger on a very bare nerve, and how he touched some of the positive aspects that characterized our Arab folk theatre,

during the context of his theoretical study, and also touched some positive aspects – practically – through his application model. Although he did not match his theoretical study with his application model, he holds the merit of precedence and pioneering in addressing this subject – in whole and in detail – on the Arab arena level.

As for Tawfiq al-Hakim, he wanted to create a new Arab theatrical mould. How noble was what he wanted, but he wanted to walk on new ground that no one had paved before him. He also chose not to look at the big step – accomplished by Yousef Idris

The Arabic Play - 129

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before him – with careful study. He also chose not to know the truth of the features of our Arab folk dramatic art, due to his non-recognition of its theatricality on one hand, and his complete belief that the Western theatrical form is the ideal form for theatrical expression.

Tawfiq al-Hakim was concerned – in his theatrical mould – with simplifying the masterpieces of world theatre, by incorporating some characters derived from the folk narrator character, thus inventing the narrator, the imitator, and the panegyrist.

But his experiment resulted in making the masterpieces of world theatre lose the credibility of their universality, and he also did not simplify them. The secret of the popularity of our Arab folk theatre lies in its ability to reach the mind and conscience of its spectators with the simplest technical means. It also lies in that its spectators are its masters, directing it to the direction they approve.

The characters of our folk theatre represent the truth of their spectators: their dreams – hopes – pains. Its subjects touch the bare nerve of the reality of their lives. Its language is a good medium for communication between both parties of the game: the artist / the spectator.

As an Arab people, we have our distinguished traits, our own visions of this existence, our language, and our concerns. How can our contemporary theatre succeed when its essence is not these very foundations by which Arab theatre rises and by which its ability to express its personality is formed?

As a people who are honest in our dealings, our sky is clear, our land is flat, we live in a candid nature. So why then do we insist on wrapping our participation in theatrical spectacle with the falseness of “etiquette”? Let us look at the regulations and laws that (some) have enacted to control the theatre auditorium. They were made so that the Arab spectator becomes other than his nature, and imposed upon him to respect the theatrical performance, even if this performance does not respect the intellectual and aesthetic requirements of its spectators.

All the fault comes out of the cloak of our Europeanized Arab theatre institutions, which were not created to serve their spectators. We demand our Arab spectator – through regulations and laws – to be fake, in order for us to describe them as civilized and refined.

Let us look at the nature of reception in all our folk arts. We will find that our spectator is the master of the performance: by their choices and directions. Let us reflect on the nature of reception in all our folk occasions, such as mulids and others. We will find that our spectator is more capable of spontaneous creativity than the creator themselves.

Let us address people according to their understanding, in the language they understand, in the way they were raised, and with the traditions of their real spectacle, which stem from the spirit of our Arab personality, not its Europeanized part. Theatre was created for the spectator, and the spectator was not created for theatre.

Let us lift the cover of falseness from our Arab theatrical art, and realize that we have a nature different from the nature of other peoples. Enough of disfiguring and falsifying ourselves, the characteristics of our Arab identity, and the traditions of our Islam.

Before we strive to create an Arab theatre that enjoys all that our folk theatre enjoyed, we must first create an Arab spectator proud of their identity, customs, and pure Arab traditions.

The Arabic Play - 131

Footnotes of Part Two

[^1]: See the three theoretical articles in: Yousef Idris: *Al-Farafeer* (الفرافير). Cairo: Maktabat Misr, n.d. pp. 7-54. [^2]: Previous source – p. 76. [^3]: The same source – p. 76, 77. [^4]: The same source – p. 98. [^5]: The same source – p. 101. [^6]: The same source – p. 105. [^7]: The same source – p. 109. [^8]: The same source – p. 119. [^9]: Review the first chapter of the first part in this book. [^10]: Review the second chapter of the first part in this book. [^11]: Review that in the second chapter of the first part in this book. [^12]: See that in the Aragoz texts in the first part of this book. [^13]: There is one play from the Aragoz plays of a tragic nature, titled "Aragoz in the Army," which addresses the subject of the killing of Aragoz's son in the October 6 War of 1973. This play is considered the latest production of the Egyptian folk imagination. [^14]: In reference to the Italian writer "Luigi Pirandello" (1867-1936). [^15]: Dr. Ibrahim Anis et al.: *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit* (المعجم الوسيط) – Vol. 2, p. 685. [^16]: Tawfiq al-Hakim: *Our Theatrical Mould* (قالبنا المسرحي). Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, n.d. p. 9. [^17]: Previous source – p. 9, 10. [^18]: See the preface of our book: *The Theatre of Naguib Sorour – The Dramatic Employment of Forms of Folk Literature* (- مسرح نجيب سرور التوظيف الدرامي لأشكال الأدب الشعبي). Cairo: Madbouly Library, 1989.

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[^19]: Tawfiq al-Hakim: Previous source – p. 10, 11. [^20]: See – previous source – p. 11. [^21]: The same previous source – p. 12 - 14. [^22]: The same source – p. 19. [^23]: See that in detail in our book (in press): "New Papers in Theatrical Art" (أوراق جديدة في الفن المسرحي) in the chapter entitled "Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Dialectical Theatre". [^24]: Tawfiq al-Hakim: Previous source – p. 20, 21. [^25]: Previous source – p. 22, 23. [^26]: The same source – p. 60, 61. [^27]: The same source – p. 61, 62. [^28]: The same source – p. 74.

This is a transcription of the text present on the page (Book Index):

Index

Subject	Page
Dedication	3
Introduction	7

Part One The Arabic Play … Historical Truth

Subject	Page
Chapter One: A Study of the Egyptian Aragoz Theatre	13
Dramatic Texts from the Egyptian Aragoz Theatre	25
Chapter Two: The Arab Folk Theatre	65

Part Two The Arabic Play … and Artistic Falseness

Subject	Page
Chapter One: The Play Al-Farafeer and the Call for an Egyptian Theatre	87
Chapter Two: Tawfiq al-Hakim and His Theatrical Mould	111
Synopsis	138

Published by the Author

1 – *The Theatre of Naguib Sorour: The Dramatic Employment of Forms of Folk Literature* (مسرح نجيب سرور : التوظيف الدرامي لأشكال الأدب الشعبي), Cairo: Madbouly Library, 1989. 2 – *Aristotle's Theory on Comedy* (نظرية أرسطو طاليس عن الكوميديا), Cairo: Madbouly Library, 1993.

- In press: 3 – *New Papers in Theatrical Art: Selected Studies* (أوراق جديدة في الفن المسرحي: دراسات مختارة).

(Completed with praise to God)

SYNOPSIS

The author of this book maintains that up to the late 1960's, the Arab Theatre has passed through stages of development. At the first stage, the Arab spectators subsisted mainly on the then available forms of folk theatre such as Khayal El-Del (The Magic Box), and Karakooz (Aragoz) along with other farcical performances. The second stage was essentially derivative and Euro-centric. It was a period of western colonization and western impenetration. Western theatrical models permeated the Arab theatre, and Arab playwrights were merely content with translating and adapting western Theatrical product. The third stage ushered in a period of great creativity. Many talented playwrights, directors and actors drew on western influences to dramatize their genuinely creative visions.

The fourth stage witnessed the emergence of two conflicting approaches to the theatre. Advocates of the first approach called for a radical break with the western theatre and attempted to 'return' to the native folk theatrical practices which had been handed down to us by our ancestors. Exponents of

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the second approach drew inspiration from indigenous theatrical techniques while, at the same time, they remained faithful to the inherent characteristics of the western theatre. Representatives of the first approach include distinguished playwrights of the calibre of Tawfik Al-Hakim and Yousef Edris, while the second approach is represented by Naguib Sorour along with many others. Ever since the publication of Edris's three epoch-making articles 'Towards an Egyptian Theatre' in 1964, writers of several theoretical studies have never ceased to question the validity and objectivity of our current theatre products. Such theorists tend to view the contemporary Arab theatre as a 'residue' of the colonial period. On the other hand, they visualize a purely Arab theatre which would honestly reflect the intellectual and emotional aspirations of the Arabs and address their basic issues and concerns. The present-day Arab theatre is, for them, a mere transposition of alien aesthetic and intellectual values.

The author of this book attributes this search for a native theatre to the politics of nationalism and pan-Arabism. This call, the author thinks, has been doctrinaire and propaganda-based. This is why this call utterly failed when its political thrust receded. The call for a native theatre, however, is believed to be a noble attempt to accomodate our native aesthetic and social values. The author seems to imply that if such a theatre is to exist, it must benefit from the inherent features of the folk

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theatre which has never failed to entertain and educate the Arab spectators. At the same time, It must be based on the technical and intellectual achievements of the western theatre

The book falls into two parts. In the first part, the author traces the historical development of the Arab theatre and outlines the general features of the Arab folk theatre. The author also discusses and analyzes the Egyptian karakooz Performances. The Study is supplemented by documentary authentic material collected by the author. The second part is an analytical study of the dramatic contributions of Tawfik Al Hakim and Yousef Edris.

About the Author

Essam El-Din Abu El-Ela (born January 3, 1962) is an Egyptian writer, critic, drama researcher, and academic professor. His full name is Essam El-Din Hassan Abu El-Ela Hussein.

Born in Old Cairo, Cairo, in January 1962, he obtained his Bachelor's degree from the Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts in 1987 with a grade of "Very Good" (ranking first in his class). He earned a postgraduate diploma from the same institute at the Academy of Arts in Cairo in 1990. He then received his Master's degree in Drama and Theatrical Criticism in 2000 with a grade of "Excellent". In 2005, he was awarded his Doctorate (PhD) in Drama and Theatrical Criticism from the Academy of Arts in Cairo with First Class Honors.

He has authored more than ninety short studies, all published in specialized and semi-specialized periodicals in Cairo, most notably: *Theatre Magazine* (مجلة المسرح), *Cairo Magazine* (مجلة القاهرة), *Teatro Magazine* (مجلة تياترو), and the *Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre Bulletin* (نشرة مهرجان القاهرة الدولي للمسرح التجريبي). For many years, he participated in editing the bulletin and selecting performances for the festivals of the Egyptian Association for Theatre Amateurs. He also co-edited the bulletin of the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre from 1991 until he stepped down in 1995.

He participated in the first scientific conference of the First Arab Theatre Festival, organized by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture in Cairo, with a research paper titled *Towards a Popular Theatre* (نحو مسرح شعبي). He participated in the activities of the Menofia University Festival commemorating the great poet Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi with a research paper titled *The Romanticism of Young Mahran* (رومانتيكية الفتى مهران). For many years, he participated in seminar, screening, and judging panels at the Theatre Directorate of the General Authority for Cultural Palaces, School Theatre, Youth and Sports Theatre, and University Theatre.

Published Books

1. *The Drama of Naguib Surur* (مسرح نجيب سرور) – Madbouly Library, Cairo – 1989.
2. *Aristotle's Theory of Comedy* (نظرية أرسطوطاليس عن الكوميديا) – Madbouly Library, Cairo – 1993.
3. *The Arabic Play: Historical Truth and Artistic Falseness* (المسرحية العربية: الحقيقة التاريخية والزيف الفني) – Egyptian General Book Authority – 1994.
4. *Introduction to Semiotics in Language and Theatre* (مدخل إلى دراسة علم العلامات في اللغة والمسرح) – General Authority for Cultural Palaces – 1996 – First Edition.
5. *The Technical Development of Comedy in Tawfiq al-Hakim's Works* (التطور التقني للملهاة عند توفيق الحكيم) – General Authority for Cultural Palaces – 2002.
6. *Introduction to Semiotics in Language and Theatre* (مدخل إلى دراسة علم العلامات في اللغة والمسرح) – Egyptian General Book Authority – 2005 – Second Expanded Edition.
7. *The Mechanisms of Reception in Tawfiq al-Hakim's Plays* (آليات التلقي في درامات توفيق الحكيم) – Egyptian General Book Authority – 2007.
8. *What is Drama* (ما الدراما) – Egyptian General Book Authority – 2022.

Short and Medium Studies

He has published dozens of short and medium-length studies since 1988 in journals including: *Cairo* (القاهرة), *Theatre* (المسرح), *Folk Arts* (الفنون الشعبية), *New Culture* (الثقافة الجديدة), *Theatre Horizons* (آفاق المسرح), *Teatro* (تياترو), and *Our Theatre* (مسرحنا).

Book Introductions

1. Introduction to the play *Mother of the Axe* (أم الفاس) by the Saudi writer Malha Abdullah.
2. Introduction to the book *The Impact of Bedouin Life on Theatre in Saudi Arabia* (أثر البداوة على المسرح في السعودية) by the Saudi writer Malha Abdullah.
3. Introductions to plays for various volumes of the *Literary Illuminations* (إشراقات أدبية) series – Egyptian General Book Authority.

4. Introduction to and editing of Volumes 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the *Complete Works of Naguib Surur* (الأعمال الكاملة لنجيب سرور) – Egyptian General Book Authority.
5. Introduction to the play *Ali Baba* (علي بابا) by Tawfiq al-Hakim – Egyptian General Book Authority.

Dramatic and Creative Writings

1. *A Husband's Love Affairs* (غراميات زوج) – A comedy in two acts – 1995.
2. *The Absent* (الغائب) – A one-act drama – published in *Theatre Horizons* magazine.
3. *The Age of Chaos* (زمن الفوضى) – A dramatic elegy in one act.
4. *Paradise of the East* (فردوس الشرق) – A 30-episode radio drama series broadcast by the Cultural Program Radio in 2009, starring: Galal El-Sharkawy, Manal Salameh, and a group of Egyptian radio drama stars; Music by: Michel El-Masry, Directed by: Ragab El-Halawani.

Academic and Professional Career

- **Demonstrator**, Department of Drama and Criticism, Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts (appointed July 27, 1989).
- **Assistant Lecturer**, Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism (appointed 1998).
- **Lecturer**, Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism (appointed 2005).
- **Associate Professor**, Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism (appointed 2010).
- **Head of the Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism** (from 2010 until he resigned from the chairmanship in November 2017).
- **Professor**, Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism (appointed May 2020).
- **Member of the Permanent Promotions Committee** in the fields of Drama and Theatrical Criticism at the Academy of Arts.
- **Head of the Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism** (from July 2020 until he resigned from the chairmanship in February 2021).

He has supervised and examined numerous Master's and Doctoral (PhD) theses at the Academy of Arts, Alexandria University, Menofia University, Ain Shams University, Zagazig University, Benha University, and Mansoura University.

In addition to teaching in the three departments at the Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts at the Academy of Arts in Cairo and the Academy of Arts unit in Alexandria, he taught at the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University for several years, and the Department of Drama and Theatrical Criticism at the Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University for several years. He has also been teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the Higher Institute of Folk Arts for many years, and taught at the Higher Institute of Child Arts.

He worked on play reading panels at the Theatre Directorate of the General Authority for Cultural Palaces for many years, as well as radio drama reading panels at the Radio Sector in Maspero for several years before stepping down. He currently serves on the play reading committee at the Artistic House of Theatre under the Egyptian Ministry of Culture.